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THE PHILOSOPHY OF
INDIAN
MONOTHEISM

M. P. CHRISTANAND

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Foreword

A great deal of sociological ink has been spilt over the past seventy-five years in an attempt to describe the relationship of religion to society. We have been under the spell of the most prestigious minds in the discipline—Durkheim and Weber.

Not often do these great comparativists have counterparts in religion able to view the problem posed by religion in modern society with the same breadth which they brought to the field. Durkheim and Weber force us to adopt a comparative perspective in approaching religion. The great dictum of Durkheim, that society is the soul of religion,¹ moves us into a study of the different ways of interpreting reality. These differences are then attributed to the divergent ways men have of organizing social institutions. (Following this line, Granet related fundamental differences in Chinese and Western thought forms to divergent institutional orders in the East and the West.)² Furthermore, Weber seems to have worked with the dangerous assumption that 'social and cultural developments of the modern West were of *universal* significance in the development of human society and culture'.³ But these lines of thought and assumptions give rise to the debatable issues that command the attention of scholars in the field today. What is probably not debatable is the issue which is so prominent in Dr Christanand's work which is presented here. It has been well stated by the American sociologist, Talcott Parsons:

I think we can say . . . that the 'higher' religions . . . always transcend any particular society. Thus even Confucianism, the most 'particularistic' of the religions associated with the general 'philosophic breakthrough' of the first millenium B.C., has become an essential constituent of the culture, not only of China, but also of Japan and Korea and much of Southeast Asia. Certainly Hinduism and

¹ Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1915, p. 419.

² Granet, Marcel, *La pensee chinoise*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1950.

³ Cf., Parsons, Talcott, commentary in *The Religious Situation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1968, pp. 693ff.

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Buddhism, and also Judaism, if not alone, then through its impact on Islam and still much greater impact on Christianity, have gone far beyond a role in any particular 'ethnic' community....⁴

No doubt Dr Christanand can draw on his own experience to show that Christianity does indeed transcend the Western societies that formed its matrix as does Hinduism its Eastern matrix. Surely it is voices like his, which have been raised from time to time in the history of religions, that have given to any religion whatever rightful claim it can make to call itself a truly Catholic or universal religion.

Washington D.C.

JOSEPH B. AXENROTH
Professor of Sociology

⁴ Ibid., pp. 690ff.

Preface

Many Eastern religious ideas seem to have come to America to stay. Yoga, Transcendental Meditation, the Hare Krishna movement, and the Advaitic school are among the most prominent. Some see them as a threat to Christianity. To others they are like the American fads that pop up today and disappear tomorrow. Church leaders are likely to see them as maladies of the age. But some people find them to be a good compromise between God and secularism. They offer a new life worth trying out, satisfying the demands of both religion and secularism.

Whether seen as threat or fad or compromise is not so important as the fact that the attention given to Eastern religions by Americans has made Easterners more aware of the value of their heritage; while Western Christians have become less complacent with respect to theirs.

Rooted as I am in two traditions, the Hindu, my family heritage, and the Judaeo-Christian, a free gift of the loving God, which I cherish most, I must reflect on my own situation.

But reflection leads me to my ancestry. The Dravidian 'Pillai' stock—the caste label which Hindu tradition has given me—goes back 4000 years to the pre-Aryan Indus Valley Civilization. The strict orthodox Saivaite religious experiences of my near ancestors still seem operative in our lives. No family in India can boast of a heritage more steeped in Hindu tradition than ours.

Hindus by tradition and culture, we did not find that the acceptance of the faith offered to us by Christian Missionaries, nor our commitment to it, interfered in any way with our tradition, except perhaps to perfect it, making it more refined. Christian faith gave us great joy and contentment and a meaning to our culture which we never dreamt of before. Thought patterns, habits of food and dress, the appreciation of art, music and literature—none of these were changed. But we received new life—a new animation, a new meaning to everything—which transformed us and made us all the more appreciative of our own culture and tradition.

PREFACE

The transition from Hinduism to Christianity seemed so natural and necessary to my people that I was interested in looking for the connecting link between these two religious traditions.

Others have found a connecting link in such terms as 'fulfilment', 'The Unknown Christ of Hinduism', 'the Anonymous Christian', '*Preparatio evangelica*', etc. But none of these was satisfying to me. They did not seem to express the full reality of the connecting link I sought.

I, therefore, searched the scriptures of both traditions to spell out the reality that unites them. The result is this book.

The debts incurred in writing this book are so numerous that it is hardly possible to remember them all. The first, however, is the one that I owe to my *guru*, Swami Satyananda (Rev. H.O. Mascarenhas of happy memory), who is the source of most of the ideas expressed in the last chapter. The second I owe to the Union Theological Seminary in New York, where most of the writing was done, and to its President, whose invitation to come to New York made it possible for me to get the necessary study leave from my university at Patiala, in India. My third debt is to the Reverend Fathers Edward Hogan and Thomas Mannion of the Brooklyn Diocese. Their financial assistance and kindness was a source of strength and energy without which I could not have attempted to write this book. To two persons especially go my unrestrained praise and thanks: Dr V. Upadhyaya and Mr John Kunzweiler. For various forms of editorial assistance I am deeply indebted to Dr V. Upadhyaya of the Department of Sanskrit, University of Delhi. His wisdom and friendship have been of indispensable value in the completion of the book. For the generous help in getting the manuscript typed and for every encouragement lavished on me while the book was in progress, the credit goes to John and his lovely family.

October, 1979

M.P. CHRISTANAND

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Introduction

Monotheism or the belief in only one God is a response to the enquiry into the nature of God and not into the number of gods. God's existence and His nature are the subject matter of the Philosophy of Religion. The term Philosophy of Religion is a relative new-comer to the philosophical lexicon, but its subject matter is as old as philosophy itself. The genesis of philosophy, both in ancient India and in ancient Greece lay in the emergence of doubt concerning religious beliefs and traditions. This rational scrutiny of the claims of religion with a view to making a reasonable response to them is what constituted the philosophy of religion as a branch of philosophy.

Philosophy of Religion, therefore, is an enquiry into the general subject of religion from the philosophical point of view, i.e., an enquiry employing the accepted tools of critical analysis and evaluation without any predisposition to defend or reject the claims of any particular religion.

It is, therefore, a systematic investigation of the elements of religious consciousness, the theories it has evolved, their developments and their historic relationships in the cultural complex. It takes into account religious practices only as illustrations of the vitality of beliefs.

It is distinct from theology in that it recognizes the priority of reason over faith, subjecting the latter to a logical analysis. As such, the history of the Philosophy of Religion is coextensive with the free enquiry into religious reality, particularly the concepts of God, soul, immortality, sin, salvation, the sacred, etc., and may be said to have its roots in any society above the prelogical, mythological or custom-controlled level.

While the data supplied by the religions of the world include the data of the so-called classical religions, Philosophy of Religion, in the genuinely philosophical sense, takes for its material religious expressions of all types (whether classical or not) together with all the psychological material available on the nature of the human spirit and man's whole cultural development.

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The history of philosophy shows the concern of western philosophers regarding the arguments for and against the existence of a supreme personal deity, whereas eastern philosophers by contrast are concerned with the nature of God, seeking to clarify the relationship of the supreme ineffable One with the things of the world that constitute its manifestation. They argue for the ultimate unreality of the empirical world. But in both cases, the basic question is the question of justifiability of beliefs. And beliefs are supplied by religion. Therefore one naturally asks: 'What is religion'?

Religion is as old as the human race itself. There are no peoples however primitive without some sort of religion.¹ Yet, it is the most controversial of all subjects. Even on the very definition of the word 'religion' there is no agreement.

Etymologically, Cicero derives the word from *relegere*,² which means 'to gather, count or observe', that is, to observe the signs of a divine communication or 'to read the omens'. Lattanzius,³ on the other hand, derives it from *religare*, meaning 'to bind', so that *religio* meant a relationship. St. Augustine follows Lattanzius, without denying Cicero's meaning.⁴ In a broad sense, therefore, religion means a relationship between a Superior Being and man.

In the West, religion has been looked upon as a 'fixed relationship' between the human self and some non-human entity, the Sacred, the Supernatural, the Self-existent, the Absolute or simply 'God'.⁵ But in the East, religion is described in terms of 'movement', as a 'way'. Thus, we have the '*hedos*' or the way of the Pharisees. Buddhism is described as 'the noble eightfold path'. Hinduism depicts religions as rivers which take men to the ocean of God. The Japanese religion is called 'Shinto', the way of the gods and Confucius calls his message 'the way'.⁶

There are, therefore different ways of describing religion. Leaving out those who do not admit the principle of contradiction and to whom yes and no, true and false, mean the same thing, and taking only those who sincerely argue in search of the truth, we find that the lack of a common measure for judging opposed views tends to make religion incommunicable. For example, let us take the fundamental distinction of natural and a supernatural religion. There are those who conceive of religion as having a supernatural foundation in God's revelation and authority, and there are those who think of religion as having a purely natural origin in certain human tendencies, which makes it no different from philosophy and science as an element of

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culture. Those who affirm the supernatural origin of religion base their argument on God's gift, Faith. But to the opponents, God's gift is nothing but a manifestation of man's own need to believe.⁷

Then, there is the plurality of religions. Even among those who agree that religion is not man-made, that it requires in some form divine authority and inspiration, there is a diversity of faith, worship, and rites. Therefore, this issue between men of different faiths becomes as difficult to solve as that between the religious and the irreligious, raising a question of truth and falsity to a believer, whose faith excludes the possibility of several equally true religions.

When we come to the historical plane, our survey leaves us even more bewildered, faced as we are with a jumble of phenomena: totems, spirits, ghosts, ancestor worship, cult of nature, animal worship, animism, animatism, magic, polytheism, monotheism and monism. Every religion seems to be a complex of many elements. There is no one specific feature which adequately characterizes it. A complete and consistent classification is therefore impracticable and not necessary.

One thing, of course, is certain—in religion we are on another plane, the world of the supernatural, the world of God.

God is an Anglo-Saxon word, but ultimately derived from Sanskrit, *hu*, to invoke, or *hu*, to sacrifice to.⁸ Among all peoples, in all times, in all places, the idea of and the faith in, a *supreme being*, creator and lord of the universe, and of man especially, has always been existent.⁹

This has been the great achievement of modern anthropology. Tylor's theory is still in search of primitive peoples without religion. All efforts at substantiating the preconceived idea that the 'origin' of the primitive idea of God must be very crude and simple and different from the 'developed forms' has been a failure. It was Father Wilhelm Schmidt, the great anthropologist, who by his voluminous work, successfully disproved the simple evolutionary progression in religion. Whether it is Comte's fetishism-polytheism-monotheism or Tylor's animism-polytheism-monotheism or Marett's pre-animism (dynamism)-animism-polytheism-monotheism, all seem to fail miserably when faced with factual religious phenomena of the so-called primitive or savage people.

Thanks to the ethnologists and historians of religion, there are two conclusions, which emerge with high probability. The first is that the belief in 'high gods' goes back to an untraceable antiquity and the second is that man has always been rational. Professor J.L. Meyers

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clearly shows that the savage's 'knowledge based on observation is distinct and accurate'.¹⁰

It is not true that primitive man was incapable of abstraction. It is quite true that logical and philosophical abstractions were foreign to him. In the near East we find extended power of prelogical abstraction. The earliest known stages of Egyptian, Sumerian and Semitic languages show that general qualities such as 'goodness, truth, purity' could be abstracted and such formation(s) go back to 5000 B.C.¹¹

This belief in a 'high God', or 'One Supreme Being', in the history of religion was so widely spread that its discovery in the *Rig-Veda* became an incontestable proof to the advocates of this theory. But its later growth and evolution into a monotheistic God is what this book essays to describe. To the student of philosophy Indian monotheism will be a fascinating subject. Its philosophical analysis in the context of other monotheistic religions of the world, should evoke greater interest and fascination, especially when the western and even some eastern scholars have so far denied it a place among the monotheistic religions of the world.

NOTES

1. Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Magic, Science and Religion and other essays*, Doubleday & Co, New York, 1948, p. 17.
2. 'De natura deorum', II, 28, in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, Instituto per la collaborazione culturale, Venezia-Roma, 1957, p. 43.
3. Moschetti, A.M., 'Religione' in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, ibid., Vol. IV, p. 43.
4. 'De Civitate Dei', X, 3, in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, ibid., Vol IV, p. 43.
5. Bouquet, A.C., *Comparative Religion*, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1964, p. 12.
6. Ibid.
7. Hutchins, Robert Maynard (ed.), *Great Books of the Western World*, Vol. 3, 'The Great Ideas', II, pp. 588-9.
8. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, William Benton, London, 1960, Vol. 10, p. 459.
9. *Dictionary of Dogmatic Theology*, The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1957, p. 112.
10. Malinowski, op. cit., p. 26.
11. Albright, William Foxwell, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, Doubleday Anchor Books, New York, 1957, pp. 175-6.

CHAPTER I

Notion and Types

I ask, unknowing,
those who know, the sages,
as one all ignorant
for sake of knowledge,
What was that one
who in the Unborn's image
hath stablished and fixed firm
these worlds' six regions

RV. I. 164.6

There are two ways of entering into the study of monotheism. The first is the way of those who affirm that monotheism is the monopoly of the Semitic religions and so they can hardly see any monotheism outside the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. The second is the way of those who are equally emphatic in their assertion that the *Vedas* contain everything; therefore, the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions contribute nothing to the concept of monotheism.

Both, I think, are wrong, because both approach the field of investigation with closed minds. The search into the history of the past requires an open mind. The more open we are, the better will we grasp the different views expressed by men of different religions on monotheism. With this in mind, let us begin our study with the notion of monotheism.

Monotheism is a religio-philosophic term, derived from the Greek words *mono + theos*, meaning 'one only God'. It signifies a belief in only one God to the exclusion of all other gods. There are two other words, which also mean the same thing. They are deism, derived from the Latin word for God, *deus* and theism, derived from the Greek word *theos*, also meaning God.

Deism signifies belief in one God, who is (a) personal, (b) worthy of adoration and (c) separate from the world.

Theism signifies belief in one God, who is (a) personal, (b) worthy of adoration, (c) separate from the world but (d) continuously active

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it. Some writers use this word as a synonym for monotheism.

Monotheism is opposed to polytheism, pantheism and henotheism on the positive side and atheism, agnosticism and naturalism on the negative side.

Polytheism is the belief or cult in which several or many gods are not only recognized but also worshipped at the same time.

Henotheism is the belief that there are many gods but allegiance is restricted to one of them at a time.

Pantheism is the belief that God is identical with nature or with the world as a whole. God is all and all is God.

Atheism is the belief that there is no God of any kind.

Agnosticism is the belief that we do not have sufficient reason either to affirm or deny the existence of God.

Naturalism is a theory that 'every aspect of human experience, including man's moral and religious life, can be adequately described and accounted for in terms of his existence as a gregarious and intelligent animal, whose life is organic to his material environment'.¹

From this classification, it is easy to understand what we mean when we say that monotheism is opposed to atheism, agnosticism, naturalism, henotheism and polytheism; but it is not so easy to differentiate it from deism and pantheism, because all three mean 'a belief in one God'. Therefore, it is necessary to compare and contrast monotheism with deism and pantheism to obtain a clear concept of the term. Let us begin with primitive monotheism, it being another word which is often confused with monotheism.

WE ARE NOT DEALING WITH PRIMITIVE MONOTHEISM

The word monotheism was coined in comparatively modern times in the context of primitive monotheism to designate the belief in one Supreme God as the origin of all religions.

Historical research into the original form of religion started from *a priori* principles either evolutionistic or monotheistic and led to contradictory positions. D. Hume, J. Rousseau, A. Comte and others maintained that monotheism developed out of polytheism. Voltaire, on the other hand, put monotheism at the beginning. Andrew Lang, and above all, W. Schmidt and his school wrote volumes to confirm this point of view. Schmidt, however, does not speak of an actual monotheism, but of some earlier monotheism (*urmonotheismus*), pre-supposed on the basis of current data.

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It is now admitted that there existed a widespread belief in 'high gods'. But it is not yet monotheism, since it admits the existence of other numinous beings, although on a lower level. Nor has it been proved that belief in a 'high God' leads on without a break to monotheism. Further, belief in the 'high gods' is not a uniform phenomenon. In pastoral cultures, the 'high God' is the 'heavenly father', at the agricultural stage, 'mother earth', and in the presumably older stage of hunting, the 'lord of the beasts'. In weighing these facts, R. Pettazoni points out that wherever monotheism prevailed against polytheistic concepts, it was always, due to the decisive intervention of a particular religious figure such as Zarathustra in Iran, Mohammad in Islam, the prophets in Israel and Guru Nanak in India. It is in this sense that he speaks of monotheism as revolutionary.

Though it is not our intention here to enter into the nature of primitive religion, which may now be considered as historically insoluble, yet two facts have emerged as a result of this prolonged research into the origin of religions. They are: (i) Among the most primitive peoples, the idea of God is not only present but it appears less mixed-up with non-religious ideas than in more 'advanced' cultures. (ii) Recent experiments prove that in many areas, negative conclusions arrived at previously must be considered as doubtful because earlier investigators lacked the philosophical and psychological training that would have enabled them to perceive that conscience attains, even if by different ways, the same reality despite differences of representation, formulation and symbols.

Therefore, the notion of a Supreme God needed for religion is not a highly metaphysical conception. The God of religion is the unspeakably great Lord on whom man depends, in whom he recognizes the source of happiness and perfection; He is the righteous judge rewarding good and punishing evil; the loving and merciful Father, whose ear is ever open to the prayers of His needy and penitent children. Such a conception of God can readily be grasped by simple unphilosophic minds, by children, by unlettered peasants, by the savage and by the primitive. Hence, *monotheism, like polytheism, is a concrete system of religion and it does not solely concern itself with the origin of religions.*

MONOTHEISM IS NOT DEISM

As a matter of fact, up to the nineteenth century, these two terms, deism and theism (meaning monotheism), were used indiscriminately.

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It also became customary to restrict deism to only those philosophical positions which involved a denial of every form of revelation. The term has a historical, rather than a technically philosophical significance. Deist writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, starting from Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), the father of English deism, sought to establish natural religion upon the basis of reason and free inquiry, without any reference to supernatural revelation. They were critical, if not hostile, in their attitude towards scriptures.

In their view, the relationship between God and the world could be reduced to God's function regarding the initial impulse given by Him. The classical example is that God wound up the clock of the world once and for all at the start, so that it could run on without His interference. Any free action of God's grace in man's history (by the word of revelation or by miracles or by any other interference) is therefore radically excluded. They championed the remoteness of God and taught that God is absolutely aloof from the universe and so wholly transcendent.

This deist conception of God corresponds to a basic development of the modern mentality. Science has provided a natural explanation for everything. There is no need to trouble God any longer to act as a stop-gap wherever natural causes fail to explain things. The failure is only momentary. Explanations will be found sooner or later. Thus, deism is what is popularly called the doctrine of an 'absentee God'.

Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, subjected the deistic position to a devastating criticism. But we are not concerned with its criticism or with the proof that deism is wrong. What we want to show is that deism is not monotheism, because of the following reasons:

(i) While deism repudiates revelation and grace or any kind of interference by God the ordinary working of the world, monotheism does not. It admits God's continuous help and co-operation or concurrence in the very existence and all the activities of the world.

(ii) While deism tends to regard God as being totally outside the material universe, monotheism favours the notion of an immanent God. It does not regard God and the universe as identical like pantheism, but it asserts that God is both immanent and transcendent. That is, while God is operative 'in' the universe, He is also to some extent 'beyond' it.

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(iii) Deism as well as pantheism, as we shall show later, are the outcome of extreme intellectualism, whereas monotheism is the outcome of religious motives and interests. It stands closer to religious consciousness as is evident from the religious and spiritual values which have played an important part in forming the theistic view of the world. When men approach God by the path of working religion, they do not ask how rationally to conceive him, they inquire how the needs of the spirit lead them to represent God in relation to the world.

MONOTHEISM AND PANTHEISM

Philosophically speaking, the concept of monotheism could easily be confused with pantheism. Most of us use the word pantheism to mean a philosophical doctrine, which identifies the world with God. It is often summed up as the doctrine that 'all is God' and 'God is all'. Monotheism, on the other hand, is said to teach that God is not identical with the world and the two, God and the world, are two different realities.

But a deeper study of the thought behind the doctrine of pantheism shows that it is too abstract, too vague in its meaning to give us any clear insight into the essence of a philosophical pantheism as opposed to a philosophical monotheism. The reason is this: the concept of 'pantheism' contains two propositions: (i) God is one and (ii) God is identical with all reality or with the principle upon which all reality depends. Now, it may be asked, 'are these two propositions contrary to each other, so that affirming the one we logically deny the other?'

The answer is 'No', because, it all depends on what meaning one gives to 'reality'. And this meaning depends upon the special interpretation and the special viewpoints of the critics or sects of philosophers of a given school, because the one who asserts the 'unity of God' may or may not be laying stress upon the fact that he also makes a sharp distinction between the reality called 'God' and other realities such as 'world', 'men', 'matter', etc. Even the monotheist admits that the reality of God is not the reality of the world. They are on two different levels. God is infinite and the rest are finite. The infinite reality is certainly *identical with God* and the finite is not. Therefore, when the pantheist says that God is the reality, it does not necessarily follow that he denies the existence of the world, of a different reality. To him the world is a dream or appearance or maya or a phenomenon and has no reality without God, which philosophically is not different from monotheism.

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Therefore, the proposition 'God is one' has a definite meaning for anyone who advances a philosophical opinion concerning the nature of God. But the proposition, 'God is all' or 'God is all reality' has, in the history of thought, no one meaning. Its meaning becomes clear only when the person who asserts this proposition tells us what he means by 'all' and 'reality'; without grasping the essential principles of the metaphysical doctrine of the philosopher who asserts this proposition, we cannot conclude that his pantheism is not monotheism.²

WHERE MONOTHEISM PARTS WAYS WITH PANTHEISM

Let us take the first proposition 'God is one', which is common to both monotheism and pantheism. In speaking of the nature of the 'one God', there are those who assert that God is immanent in the world and there are those who assert that God transcends the world, that is, He is wholly outside the world which He has created or with which He is contrasted. Yet, these two doctrines, in certain philosophical contexts, need not appear to stand in opposition to each other. Therefore, there is a third group of people who insist that God is in a certain sense 'immanent' in the world and also in a certain sense 'transcendent' in His relation to the world. The example of Aristotle is pertinent here. He was asked by an enquirer, 'How is God related to the world?' Keeping in mind the example of the army, with which the Greeks were familiar, and in which there were two principles contributing to its efficiency, 'order' within and the 'general' without, the enquirer went on: 'Is it as "order" is to the army: or "the general is to the army"?' Aristotle replied, 'God is both: the "order" of the world and the "general".'³ Thus, the opposition between divine immanence and divine transcendence is reconciled in monotheism by insisting that God is both transcendent and immanent, whereas pantheism excludes the transcendence of God.

A second point of distinction on the nature of God between the monotheists and the pantheists is the stress which monotheists lay on the 'personality' of God; the pantheistic doctrines have as their essential feature the tendency to view God as 'impersonal'. 'From this point of view, it would be of the essence of monotheism to declare that the one God is a person, while it would be of the essence of those doctrines which are opposed to monotheism to declare, in a fashion, which might remain simply negative, that the divine being is not personal.'⁴

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But here again, the very concept of personality is a comparative late-comer to the history of thought and as yet has not reached the point of becoming a well-defined notion. It is one of the most difficult ideas to define. Therefore, to define monotheism as a belief in a personal God will not solve the problem of separating it from other types of theism. And, once again, philosophy fails and it is to the credit of religion that monotheism survives.

Thirdly, many monotheists consider the doctrine of creation (creation out of nothing) as being essential to monotheism and pantheism cannot philosophically subscribe to the theory of creation. Its logical corollary is emanation. But the issues regarding creation are, after all, special issues. They have no bearing upon the problem of monotheism. 'Creationism' is the familiar doctrine that 'the world was created by God'. Even the pantheists admit creation. But the meaning they attach to creation varies according to their idea of God. Therefore, this also should be taken into consideration when we distinguish monotheism from pantheism.

MONOTHEISM DRAWN FROM CONCRETE RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS

These three distinguishing features, namely, immanence and transcendence, personality of God and the creationist theory are only aids to arrive at a clear concept of monotheism, but our effort to project the well-defined concept of monotheism and to single it out from other theistic concepts will not be rewarded by appealing to philosophy. So far, in the history of philosophy, there is not a single convincing definition which can be applied only to monotheism and not to other theisms. This is bound to happen, because the concept of monotheism is not a philosophical concept but a religious concept. The problems, both about 'God' and about 'the gods', have been inherited by the philosophers from religions whose origins antedated their philosophies. Monotheism was taken from concrete religions, which lived and professed monotheism. It is only through the study and analysis of these religions that one could in a fairly satisfactory way explain what 'monotheism' is and what it stands for.

The idea of God in monotheism, therefore, is the result of the response to the demands of religious experience, and spiritual life. This response gradually became the object of reflection and reflections led to coherent cogitation on the notion of God. Thus, the reflections on practical 'monotheistic basis' led to a systematized theoretical religion

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and theology in course of time. Philosophy came in later to investigate and systematize the notion of monotheism.

In concrete religious systems, the 'belief in one God' means to abandon, often with contempt or aversion, many older beliefs, hopes, fears and customs relating to the 'many gods', or to the other powers, whose place or dignity the 'one God' tends henceforth to take and to retain. This is what happened when Judaism or Islam or Sikhism replaced old local faiths. 'If one were satisfied to view the contrast in the light of cases closely resembling these, and these only, then the natural opponent of monotheism as a belief in 'one God' would appear to be, in the history of religions, polytheism as a belief in many gods.'⁵

THREE TYPES OF MONOTHEISM

The belief in one God in practice assumes different forms in different cultures. There are at present three types of monotheism; that of India, that of Greece and that of Israel. They form the three varieties of philosophical monotheism. All three are important both for philosophy and religion as they throw much light on the different ways of viewing the Divine Being. Josiah Royce calls them the Hebraic, Hellenistic and Indic Monotheisms.⁶

Hebraic Monotheism

The ancient Hebrew religion, promulgated by Moses in the name of Jehovah was an impressive form of monotheism. At a time when the neighbouring nations representing the highest civilization of that time, namely, Egypt, Babylonia and Greece were rendering impure and idolatrous worship to many deities, we find the Hebrew people professing a religion in which idolatry, impure rites, and degrading mythologies had no legitimate place but where, instead, belief in the 'One True God' was associated with a dignified worship and a lofty moral code. The Jewish people were thus God's chosen people, not so much by reason of their own merit, as because they were destined to prepare the way for the absolute and universal belief in the 'One True God'.

The God of Moses is no more a tribal deity. He is the Creator and Lord of the world. He is a jealous God, forbidding not only worship of strange gods but the use of idolatry. Love of God is made a duty, but reverential fear is entertained chiefly in temporal rewards and punishments. This monotheism has been referred to by the

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historians of religions as *ethical monotheism* because here, God is defined as the righteous ruler of the world, whose law is 'holy' and who secures the triumph of the 'right'.

Hellenistic Monotheism

The monotheism which has its historical origin in Greek religion may be called 'Hellenistic Monotheism'. By Greek religion, we mean all the religious practices and beliefs of the ancient Greeks throughout their hundreds of communities in the Mediterranean world and the adjacent areas. It embraces a long span of time from the Mycenaean period (1600-1100) to the age of the Emperor Justinian (A.D. 527-565).

A distinction, however, must be made between the masses and the philosophers. The popular religion was polytheistic, ritualistic and mystery-dominated. However, in Hellenic polytheism, the Supreme God, Zeus, a combination of the Cretan god of fertility and the Indo-European god of the sky and lightning, tended to merge with destiny (Moirā). Destiny and divinity in the long labour of synthesis produced the Homeric religion in its totality.

But the intellectual search of the philosophers into the underlying reality of the world was leading them to a monotheism which was based on the definition of God considered as *motor immobilis* or the source, or the explanation or the correlate or the order of the world.⁷ Aristotle's statement quoted previously, regarding whether God is identical with the order of the army or with the general of the army, is a good example of the form which the problem of monotheism took from this point of view.

Indic Monotheism

The third form of monotheism is what Josiah Royce calls 'Indic Monotheism'. Perhaps we could call it the 'Brahmanic' monotheism, because it is represented by those systems of belief and doctrine, which are all answers to the questions on 'the nature of Brahman'. It is distinct from the other two in this that it tends to insist not only upon the sole reality of God but upon 'the unreality of the world'. 'It might be summed up in the proposition "God is real" but all else, besides God, that appears to be real is but an "appearance" or if better estimated, *is a dream*.'⁸ The affirmation is: God is One, precisely because everything else is nothing but a phenomenon.

This threefold distinction now enables us to study monotheism in a better way, elucidating many points that have usually been left

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obscure. The ethical monotheism of the Prophets of Israel was not the product of any philosophical thinking. Christianity, which is but a continuation of the religion of Israel, required philosophical interpretation and in the course of the development of the Church, it sought aid from Greek philosophy. Consequently, Christian monotheism has drawn the expression of its religious doctrine both from the Jews and from the Greeks.

In India too, there is a parallel to Hebraic monotheism in the Varuna Hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, and a parallel to Hellenistic monotheism in the Vedantic philosophy. Perhaps Sikh monotheism, which is an attempt to synthesize Rig-Vedic and Vedantic monotheisms could be compared to Christian monotheism.

Since, historically, the development of the concept of monotheism took place in the culture of a western religio-philosophic tradition, a study of the Hebraic, the Hellenistic and the Christian monotheisms will not be out of place in our study of Indian monotheism. On the contrary, it would help us to understand it better.

NOTES

1. Hick, John, *Philosophy of Religion*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1963, p. 4.
2. Royce, Josiah, 'Monotheism', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1971, Vol. 8, p. 817.
3. Ibid., p. 817. In the words of Aristotle: 'The good (i.e., God) is found both in its order and in its leader, and more in the latter.' *Metaphysics*, Bk. xii, Ch. 10.
4. Ibid., p. 818.
5. Ibid., 817.
6. Ibid., pp. 818ff.
7. Ibid., p. 819.
8. Ibid., p. 819.

CHAPTER II

Monotheism in the West

He is the God of gods
and none beside Him.
RV. X. 121. 8

HEBRAIC MONOTHEISM

In Hebrew tradition, the origin of the belief in one God is connected with the religious awakening of the patriarch Abraham near about 1700 B.C. Tradition preserved in the Book of Joshua¹ admits that Abraham's ancestors were polytheists. Abraham's call to give up polytheism, however, marked a sharp break with the past.² This is important from the point of view of the history of religions. Judaism begins with the common faith of the tribes³ in the God of Yahweh. Other people have other gods but Israel (the Jews) knows that it is bound to worship Yahweh alone (monolatry) whom it considers the greatest and the mightiest of gods.⁴

It was only through the work and teaching of Moses that a kind of practical monotheism took shape, or perhaps we should call this 'monoyahwehism', the reason being that it tended to emphasize the difference between their God Yahweh and the gods of the surrounding nations, since side by side there also existed (till the Babylonian Exile of approximately 500 B.C.) various pagan beliefs and practices among many of the ordinary Israelites. The Old Testament, however, always regarded these as aberrations. The acceptance of the pure monotheistic belief by all the people was, no doubt, a slow process. Many statements in the historical and prophetic books of the Bible prove this amply. Therefore, we should distinguish three stages in the history of monotheism of the Hebrew people: (i) the period before Moses (ii) the period during and after Moses and (iii) the period of the prophets.

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Before Moses

The patriarchs venerated God under various names, particularly those of El and Elohim and perhaps also Yahweh. El is often qualified by some other word, El-olam (the everlasting God),⁵ El-Roi (the God who sees),⁶ El-Elyon (the most high God),⁷ El-Shaddai (the almighty God)⁸ and finally 'the God of Abraham',⁹ 'the God of Isaac'¹⁰ and the 'Mighty one of Jacob'.¹¹ Because of so many names, several scholars have concluded that the Patriarchs venerated many local family gods. But there is no justification for this conclusion. These names are not distinct personal names but merely different titles of one and the same God.

Moses and after

Moses, who is of prime importance in the history of Judaism, brings out still more clearly its unique monotheism, though it would surely be a mistake to consider him the originator of monotheism in Israel. According to the Old Testament, it is the God of the Patriarchs, of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob¹² who reveals Himself to Moses as Yahweh, the really living and truly acting God.¹³ By redeeming the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, He won them for Himself as His own special possession and He made a covenant with them by which they became His people, who were henceforth to rally round Him as His own. The principal conditions of the covenant to which the Israelites pledged themselves at Mount Sinai are summed up in the Ten Commandments, of which the first is 'I am the Lord thy God,..... Thou shalt not have any strange gods before me.'¹⁴

Certain signs of departure from true monotheism are assigned by tradition to the Mosaic period itself, such as the worship of the golden calf.¹⁵ After the settlement in Canaan, the Israelites borrowed from the Canaanites a good part of their religious and cultic institutions. Thus, there arose a syncretistic religion among the people.

The Prophets

Against this decadence the Prophets directed sharp rebukes. Eliah endeavoured to force the issue between Baal and Yahweh in his effort to convince the people that Yahweh alone is God. Amos preached that Yahweh is the righteous Lord. Hosea puts more stress on the love of Yahweh for His people, who should therefore love and serve Him alone. The worship of other gods he calls adultery against Yahweh as he fights against various forms of idolatry. For Isaiah,

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Yahweh is the Holy One, the only one who is God and spirit, the only one who is exalted over all, far above everything that is evil and sinful; the idols are merely human creations to be cast aside as trash. Jeremiah and Ezekiel combat idolatry even more vigorously till in Deutero-Isaiah the absolute nothingness of the so-called gods of the pagans is clearly proclaimed.

The reason behind this choice of only one God for worship was considered to be Holiness. As long as Yahweh was looked upon as their national God, it was a question of the supremacy of the strongest, between Him and the national gods of other peoples. But when God was presented primarily in His ethical character and worshipped as a God of Holiness, there was no longer any measure of comparison. If Yahweh was the Holy God, then other gods were not holy. Here was an entirely new element, Yahweh as the moral governor of men and nations, which was absolutely unique; the god of the nations were 'elilim' (nothings), 'vanity', 'lies'. From now on, pure monotheism became the possession of the Jewish people. This has been Judaism's great contribution to the religious thought of mankind and still constitutes the burden of the Messianic ideal, the coming of the day, when all over the world 'God shall be one and His name One'.¹⁶

For the Jews, their God is above all the One God, 'Hear (Shema) O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Deut 6.4) or in the spirit of Jewish tradition: 'The Lord our God is unique Lord'. That is Israel's primordial act of faith, its supreme prayer, its chief act of witness.

This unity of God which is the basis of Israel's existence and message is neither an abstract unity, nor a mere negation of plurality. What is fundamental, in fact, in Jewish monotheism is not the proclamation of a message but the concrete, historical manifestation of the One God, the concrete historical relations between the One God and His people.

The Characteristics of Yahweh

Thus, while the Old Testament never speculates about God's essence, it often speaks of what He is and what He does for Israel, for mankind, and for the world. The various names given to God show that God is above all looked upon as a *person*, to be compared to human persons. But He is more than a mighty and immortal man, such as the gods of the pagans. In fact, great emphasis is laid on the contrast between God and man. Yahweh is God and not man.¹⁷

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The difference between God and man is no less than that which exists between spirit and flesh.¹⁸ This supposes that the concepts of God and *spirit* were regarded as equivalent. God's essence is known from the fact that He is powerful, living and above all, holy.¹⁹ And His power is seen in creation, in the government of the universe and of all that lives.

God is often called the 'Living God' to distinguish Him from all the other gods who are 'lifeless'.²⁰ He is the unfailing life;²¹ He is the source of life.²² But the *holiness* of God is His special characteristic. He is the Holy One,²³ the one whom man cannot look²⁴ at without running the danger of being struck dead.²⁵ This holiness of God is given a moral character, especially by the prophets. Since Yahweh is God and not man and since He is the Holy One, His wrath is relentless.²⁶ His holiness is shown in His justice;²⁷ it is outraged by Israel's lack of trusting faith²⁸ and stands in such opposition to sin that the sinner who comes in contact with God is destroyed.²⁹ The Bible is full of the expression, the 'Holy One'. And the Holy one demands a holy people, and this not merely in a ritual way³⁰ but also in a moral way.³¹ According to Ezekiel, 36. 22-27, God will achieve this when He sanctifies His people and shows forth in them His spirit, which is a divine power that leads man to good and, in a certain sense, raises him up to God.

HELLENISTIC MONOTHEISM

Among the Greeks, as we pointed out earlier, a distinction has to be made between the religion of the masses and the religion of the philosophers. The contrast is glaring. The masses worshipped many gods and goddesses and had recourse to divination, oracle, mystery cults, rituals, etc., but the philosophers were in search of a single principle. Their belief in a single principle, which tended towards monotheism, took various forms and among most of them it did not exclude a residue of faith in the traditional gods.

Pre-Socratic Philosophers

The pre-Socratic philosophers present no sharp break with the mythologists and cosmogonists who were their forerunners. The Babylonian, Egyptian and Hittite myths were not without parallels in the earliest Greek cosmogonies, as found in Homer, Hesiod, Pherecydes of Syros and the Greek lyric poets. The paramount figure to emerge from a succession of deified cosmic constituents is the god of

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thunder and lightning, Zeus, on a par with the storm gods Enlil and Marduk.

The pre-Socratic philosophers represent a gradual movement towards the processes of discursive reasoning in accounting for physical phenomena. Thus, the view of Thales that the earth rests on water or that 'water' is the principle of all things and that 'all things are full of gods' has obvious parallels in Egyptian creation myths and in the typical Mesopotamian attitude to the surrounding physical world. Parmenides, analyzing the nature of thought, concluded that it was a mistake to suppose that the universe was a system of terms in relation of the many which change and come into being and go, and that we must, therefore, think of all reality as one undifferentiated whole. Thus, he gave a logical form to a profound religious sense of some ultimate all-embracing unity. His doctrine in brief was that Being, the One, *is*, and that Becoming or, change, is illusion.

On the other hand, there were other philosophers, who affirmed the change denying the reality. 'Nothing is real except as it appears', said Protagoras. According to him, neither the external world nor our moral ideas have any independent or objective reality. To Heraclitus also, 'all things are in a flux' and no one can step twice in the same river. But this was supplemented by the notion of a pattern of change in which some principle or 'logos' was expressed. The idea of fire as a central element was a symbol of that.

To his first principle, the 'Indefinite', Anaximander applies the Homeric epithets reserved for the gods, i.e., 'eternal' (or immortal) and free from old age. For Anaximenes, 'air' or 'mist' was divine and the source of all the gods. Thus, the Milesian thinkers closely identified their prime cosmological constituents with the divine, apparently while continuing their adherence to the gods of traditional religion.

With Xenophanes of Colophon and Heraclitus of Ephesus, however, one meets with some outspoken criticism of the accepted religious belief and practice. Xenophanes criticized the concept of gods in Homer and Hesiod as anthropomorphic, and their behaviour as immoral. In their place he posited One God, completely unlike mortals, who moves all things by mere thought. Heraclitus, on the one hand identified God with the *logos*, or principle of balance in all things, and with cosmic fire or Zeus, and on the other hand, he criticized the excesses of superstition and obscenity in traditional cults.

Empedocles personified the cosmic forces of love and strife and

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made Aphrodite prior to other gods, but he was sharply critical of the anthropomorphism and cruel bloodshed embodied in religious mythology. Anaxagoras made the important contribution of considering that the whole cosmological process is controlled by a transcendent Mind (*Nous*) which he termed 'infinite' and 'self-ruled', but did not explicitly describe as 'divine'. Finally, Diogenes of Apollonia, reverted to the notion of 'air' as the basic substance and this 'air' was both intelligent and divine.

Thus, we see the pre-Socratic thinkers trying to identify God with their primary cosmological principles. They criticized traditional religion and raised the idea of a supreme deity.

Socrates and Plato

With Socrates, one finds a belief in the conventional plurality of gods going hand in hand with references to 'God' or 'the God' in the singular. The final passage of Plato's *Apology* contains references to both 'gods' and 'God' and Socrates' last words in the *Phaedo*, 'Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?', are no doubt meant to show his careful observance of traditional ritual.

Plato, on the other hand, took up the problem that confronted Parmenides and Heraclitus and carefully restated them developing the difficulties and found that their solution lay in mathematics. The realities which could be properly conceived and be known had thus to be quasi-mathematical. They consisted of general forms or principles which were real in their own right, and bestowed on all other things whatever reality those could properly claim. But there were difficulties because every relation seemed to require yet another system to make it possible. All explanations of one thing in terms of others leave us with further questions and matters unexplained. Plato was led in this way to the notion of some yet more perfect reality and he held that everything had its reality exhaustively determined by this ultimate nature of the universe. To this he gave the name 'the good', and declared in the sense indicated that this good was 'beyond being and knowledge'. This is the first explicit formulation in western thought of the idea of transcendence as it came to dominate much subsequent thinking.

The relation of the particular to the universal and of this to 'the good' the ultimate supreme reality, may not have been worked out in a satisfactory way, but at least we have the notion that all we find

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in the world derives eventually from someone transcendent source in which all imperfection is resolved.

His notion of a system of forms held together in the transcendent unity of 'the good' was a more radically instructive and formative notion, and in this notion Plato comes nearest to the idea of God in subsequent theism. But his approach to the subject did not lead him to the discovery that 'the good' has the character of a person.

Aristotle

Fragments of his early dialogues give evidence of arguments for the existence of God, from the order within the universe, and from human experience of dreams, premonitions and inner presentiments.

In several texts, however, Aristotle links nature and the divine and so paves the way for a stoic insistence on 'life according to nature'. In this he follows the lead given by Plato. But in physics, 'God becomes "immoved mover", a pure intellect who moves the outermost sphere by desire, the desire finding realization in the perfection of circular movement as an intimation of the eternal 'thinking upon thinking'. God is identical with eternal life because the actuality of thought is life, and this life is good and self-sufficient. He is His own well-being, whereas man's good lies outside himself. Each of the heavenly spheres requires its own unmoved mover to account for its particular motions. What relationship exists between the Prime Mover and these other unmoved movers is not clear. There are traces in Aristotle of an interest in mystery religions and of a personal approach to God, but the main emphasis in his treatises is on a cosmic principle removed from any preoccupation with the universe of the man in it.

The God of Aristotle, therefore, is the famous Unmoved Mover, who is little involved in the world. He is absorbed in contemplation of His own perfection. He takes no overt interest in other things, but moves all other things by attraction. Here, as elsewhere, Aristotle determined very closely the style, if not always the substance, of later religious arguments.

His distinction of potential and actual, his analysis of four types of causes, his notion of substance and accidents, and the union of form and matter became formative ideas in the religious thinking of later Christian times.

To sum up, in the philosophy of Heraclitus we find the beginnings of a doctrine of an immanent Reason operative in the world and in

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that of Anaxagoras the theory of 'Nous' as the primary moving principle. But both give us only hints of the doctrine of God, as the First Efficient Cause (Anaxagoras) and as Providence or immanent Reason (Heraclitus). Plato, by his doctrine of Ideas, his theory of transcendental Exemplary Cause and by his doctrine of Reason or Mind operative in the world and forming the world for the best, obviously but remotely paved the way for the ultimate acceptance of the One Transcendent-Immanent God.

It is true that the conception of God by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, as entirely self-engrossing and caring nought for the world and man, is foreign to the conception of the personal God of the Christians, yet it must be admitted that the natural theology of Aristotle paved the way for Christian monotheistic theology. When Platonic ideas came to be placed in the Mind of God (the concept of Aristotle), a certain syncretism of Platonism and Aristotelianism took place, where the ultimate Efficient, Exemplary and Final causes coalesced and gave a conception of reality, providing a rational expression to Christian monotheism.

CHRISTIAN MONOTHEISM

In the New Testament, monotheism is several times expressly formulated in the words of the Old Testament.³² For example, in St. Mark's Gospel, Jesus replied, 'This is the first; Listen Israel, the Lord our God is the One Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart.'³³ Again in the same Gospel we find, that 'He is one there is no other'.³⁴ In the Acts, Paul exhorts the pagans of Lystra to turn from their vain idols to the living God.³⁵ For him, the so-called gods of the pagans are really no gods at all.³⁶ St. Paul says in the First Corinthians, 'We know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but One; for even if there are what are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many such gods and many such lords, yet for us there is only One God.'³⁷

Hence, the belief in one God is basic to Christian faith. In this, a Christian must be a strict follower of his Jewish tradition. He must believe in one God. Jesus' assertion: 'Now this is everlasting life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and him whom Thou hast sent, Jesus Christ'³⁸ affirms this basic Jewish creed in the context of his own mission. This belief in one God excludes not only the worshipping of idols³⁹ or of devils,⁴⁰ but also the serving of wealth⁴¹ or of sensuality⁴² or of civil authorities that oppose the rights of God.⁴³

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In general, the same Jewish concept of God is found in the New Testament. Many of the Old Testament expressions, such as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,⁴⁴ the God of Israel and our God are used in the New Testament. The God whom the Bible reveals is a personal God, Self-existent and Self-conscious, the Creator of the universe, and the Fountain of life and blessedness.

It is true that the Bible never discusses God apart from his attributes, in as much as God is what He reveals Himself to be. It is possible, however, to conceive of God in relation to our own being either by way of similarity or contrast, even if his essence must remain incomprehensible. According to Christ, 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth'. (John, 2.24)

He is a pure spirit, in the sense that He is not complex or made up of parts, and He is without body or bodily presence, and therefore not visible to bodily senses. 'No one has ever seen God' (John, 1.18). It is clear also from the Scriptures that this invisible spirit is a personal spirit, a rational, self-conscious, and self-determining, and intelligent moral agent. The Scripture calls Him the Living God. 'As the Lord lives' occurs in many oaths. He is the master of life and death. His name Yahweh implies an essential dynamism and life; He is active, tireless. He is the Holy God—'I am God and not man; the Holy One present among you', He declares.⁴⁵ God is often termed the Father. The Old Testament applied the term 'Father' to God cautiously and never in the sense of God being 'Father' to all men. God was represented as the father of David's line or as the Father of orphans but such paternity never attained the universal extension given to it in the New Testament, which set aside the notion of a national God, who was father of Israel only, and applied it to all men. Not only are all who are led by the spirit of God, sons of God, but all may speak to Him without ceremony, as a child in the bosom of a father addressing his father by the familiar 'Abba'.⁴⁶ Jesus repeatedly reminded his hearers that God was their Father, forgiving, eager to listen, full of mercy and grace, tender and loving.⁴⁷

Finally, God's love is seen in a new light by the New Testament authors. In the Old Testament, love was never clearly universal in scope. But in the New Testament, God's goodness, kindness and love towards Israel and all mankind is clearly revealed. St. John writes, 'God is love'⁴⁸ and 'God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that those who believe in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.'⁴⁹

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This is fundamental to Christianity. God is love; but love manifests personality: a person loved and a person loving. Hence Christianity is an eminently personal religion and its God a very personal God.

Three personalistic mysteries summarize Christianity.

1. God, the absolute, and infinite, unique and wholly 'other', is not a person but *three* persons.
2. The Word of God is a person, Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man, having both divine and human natures.
3. The Spirit, which unites God the Father and His Word is also a person. This Spirit entering into the world creates a mystical personality of Christ, in which the Christian enters into a personal communion with God.

All Christian theology is ultimately a reflection on, and seeking an understanding of, these personal realities. Old Testament monotheism deeply rooted in the Jewish mind is the basis on which the mystery of the Trinity is built and at the same time is its main doctrinal obstacle. Yahweh's divinity needs no proof. Paul, a Jew, reared in the purest Jewish tradition⁵⁰ reserves the title 'O theos' exclusively for God, the Father.

Jesus Christ, though rarely called 'God' in the New Testament, is endowed with attributes and titles which were strictly divine in the Old Testament. He forgives sin⁵¹ on his own authority, perfects and completes the law,⁵² is the Supreme Master of the Sabbath⁵³ and Supreme Judge of all men,⁵⁴ and knows His Father as intimately as His Father knows Him.⁵⁵ Christ is directly called God by Paul in one passage.⁵⁶ Therefore, no student of the Bible can doubt the divine personality of Christ. Christ is a Divine Person. As for the distinct divine personality of the Holy Spirit, it is at the Last Supper that Jesus discloses it in St. John's Gospel.⁵⁷

The spirit of God became known to the Apostles through the gifts of grace which He poured out on them on the Pentecost day.⁵⁸ Although the Holy Spirit is never expressly called God, He is recognized as divine. This can clearly be seen in the letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians,⁵⁹ where it is said of Him that He penetrates into all things, even the deepest secrets of God, just as only the spirit of the individual man knows his own thoughts.

Thus, the Bible clearly speaks of three distinct persons in One God.

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The oldest trinitarian passages are in the Epistles of Paul, where he closely joins the Lord and the Spirit with God, and thereby implies that 'the God' and 'the Lord' and 'the Spirit' form a certain unit.⁶⁰ The formula which Paul uses consistently (God, Lord, Spirit) and his absolutely monotheistic teaching show clearly that his concept of the divine Trinity has nothing to do with the divine Triads of pagan religions in which a father god, a mother goddess and a son god form the traditional family of gods (Osiris, Isis and Horus in Egypt, for example).

Thus, the New Testament reveals the deepest mystery of the one Godhead as consisting in three divine persons. If God is one but also three, it follows necessarily that the sense in which He is one differs from the sense in which He is three. Otherwise, there would be contradiction in God. As already indicated, the Scriptures do not give us a fully formulated doctrine of the Trinity, but they contain all the elements out of which theology has constructed the doctrine. The teaching of Christ bears abundant testimony to the true personality of each of the persons within the Godhead and also sheds light upon the relations existing between the three components of the Trinity. The necessity to formulate the doctrine was thrust upon the Church by forces from without and it was, in particular, its faith in the divinity of Christ, and the necessity to defend it that first compelled the Church to face the duty of formulating a full doctrine of Trinity for its rule of faith. The formulation of 'One God exists in three Persons' was not fully assimilated into Christian life and its profession of faith prior to the end of the fourth century A.D.

The formulation does not solve the mystery. The mystery remains because this is not a truth discovered by reason. It is a revealed truth and reason cannot fully explain it. This trinitarian mystery had a practical result. The relation between God and man was explained in the same trinitarian way as the Life of God was explained as consisting of three persons.

Jesus, as we said before, showed special preference for the terms, 'the Father' and 'the Father in heaven'. Though the Old Testament knew God as the Father of Israel, so that they, the Israelites, could be called the children of God, divine filiation was looked upon as a privilege which resulted from God's choice of Israel. Jesus and the apostles taught that God is the Father of all men, without any distinction between Israelites and non-Israelites or between the just and the sinners. In a still more intimate sense, God is the Father of all

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those who believe in Jesus, love Him and do His will,⁶¹ because Jesus bestows on them his Spirit, through whom they become children and heirs of God and so call God as their Father.⁶² Thus, the fatherhood of God becomes much more real, not only because it supposes that man resembles God as a son resembles his father,⁶³ but much more because it bestows divine life on him. In this way, the idea of the fatherhood of God is stripped of Jewish nationalism and presented as a pure result of God's Love.

To sum up, the God of the Christians is an eternal, invisible spirit. He, being transmaterial, is bound neither to time nor place. He is omniscient, omnipotent, creator, just and merciful. His providence extends to all men and nations. He is transcendent but He is also immanent in them because He gives them their existence and sustains them in their activities. He is the God of the moral order, rewards the just and punishes the wicked. Sin being separation from God, the man who sins wilfully runs the risk of being separated from God. Moreover, as He is a Holy God, nothing defiled can enter His presence. Finally, this One God is a personal God, concretely expressed, He exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Since God is defined as Love and Word, the doctrine of three persons helps to understand better something of the Life and Love of God in Himself.

NOTES

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| 1. Josh., 24. 2. | 19. Josh., 24. 19, Isa., 5. 16. |
| 2. Gen., 12. 1-3; Acts 7. 3. | 20. Josh., 3. 10; Dan., 6. 20. |
| 3. Josh., 24. 13-25. | 21. Deut., 32. 39-40. |
| 4. Exod., 15. 11. | 22. Ps., 27. |
| 5. Gen., 21. 33. | 23. Isa., 40. 25. |
| 6. Gen., 16. 13. | 24. Exod., 3. 6; 19. 21. |
| 7. Gen., 14. 22. | 25. Exod., 19. 21. |
| 8. Gen., 17. 1. | 26. Hos., 11. 9. |
| 9. Gen., 46. 3, 24, 12, 27. | 27. Isa., 5. 6. |
| 10. Gen., 46. 1, 3. | 28. Isa., 5. 18ff. |
| 11. Gen., 49. 24. | 29. Isa., 6. 5. |
| 12. Exod., 3. 13, 15. | 30. Deut., 19. 2. |
| 13. Jer., 10. 10. | 31. Isa., 4. 3. |
| 14. Deut., 5. 6ff. | 32. Deut., 6. 4-6. |
| 15. Exod., 32. 4ff. | 33. Mark, 12. 29. |
| 16. Zech., 14. 9. | 34. Mark, 12. 32. |
| 17. Hos., 11. 9; Num., 23. 19. | 35. Acts, 14. 15. |
| 18. Isa., 31. 3. | 36. Gal., 4. 8. |

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37. I Cor., 8 4.
38. John, 17. 3.
39. II Cor., 6.16.
40. I Cor., 10.21.
41. Matt., 6.24.
42. Phil., 2-19.
43. Acts, 5.29; Mark., 12. 17.
44. Acts, 3.13.
45. Hos., 11.9.
46. Rom., 8.14-16; Gal., 4-6.
47. Matt., 6 25-33; Luke, 15.11-32.
48. John, 4.8-9.
49. John, 3.16.
50. Phil., 3.5.
51. Luke, 5.20.
52. Matt., 5.17.
53. Matt., 12.8, Mark., 3.1-7.
54. Matt., 25.31 ff.
55. Matt., 11.27.
56. Rom., 9.5.
57. John, 16.13.
58. Acts 2.3ff.
59. I Cor., 2.10ff.
60. I Cor., 13.13; Matt., 29.19.
61. Matt., 7.21 ff; Luke., 6.46; Gal., 3.26; John 1.12.
62. Rom., 8.14-17;
63. Matt., 5.43ff. Luke., 6.32-3.

CHAPTER III

The Hindu Tradition

Forget not, Singer !
this word of thine,
Which after-ages
will resound.

RV. III. 38.8

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest living religions which still has a great following. Its adherents number between 300 and 350 million. Although confined to one geographical area, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the influence of Hinduism has spread to several parts of Asia. It is now spreading to Europe and America as well, for its generous, tolerant attitude has great appeal beyond the borders of India.

Hinduism has no founder. Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Islam, Sikhism, all acknowledge a holy man as leader, founder, or legislator. But Hinduism, as Mr Govind Das has put it, 'is really an anthropological process to which, by a strange irony of fate, the name of religion has been given'.¹

It evolved over a period of about four thousand years, assimilating all kinds of religious and cultural movements in India. Hinduism calls to mind a variety of vivid pictures: one thinks of a devout Hindu performing his morning devotions by the Ganges; one hears the blowing of the conch shells and the ringing of the temple bells; one sees the crowds of worshippers in countless temples; one is amazed at the annual car-processions, the colourful Divali, Holi and Dussera festivals. Infinite are its modes of worship, diverse its rituals, and innumerable its myths, symbols, ceremonies, sects, and systems. But with all its diversity, Hinduism is a popular, flexible, and at the same time, orthodox religion.

The earliest traces of this remarkable tradition go back as far as the fourth millenium B.C. The archaeological discoveries of the Indus Valley civilization (after World War I), and the deciphering of the Proto-Indian script, have given us new insights into the ancient

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history of the world. The citadels discovered at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, in the then Indian State of Punjab (now Pakistan), exploded forever the myth that the Aryans were the founders of Hinduism.

The religion of the Indus cities survived long after the cities themselves had been destroyed by the Aryans. Thus, the Aryans did not enter a cultural vacuum, but as they expanded, they adopted the religion of the Indus Valley, making it their own, and carrying it into the Gangetic plains and beyond to the farthest east. Gradually, the Indus Valley culture merged with Aryan culture in a great and growing synthesis.

The people of the Indus Valley and the Aryans were not the only ones to create the Hindu tradition, however. There was a third source: the Dravidian South. 'Dravidian' is a linguistic term identifying the group of languages spoken in the south of India which do not belong to the family of Aryan languages. They are, mainly, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada. They have a past which goes back to pre-Aryan times. At present although they have been absorbed into the Aryan culture, yet the influence of their distinct culture on the Hindu tradition has been so great that the Dravidian South can in no way be neglected when one is looking for a full understanding of Hinduism.

In order to understand the Hindu tradition, even in its bare minimum, one must know something of the sources: the Indus Valley civilization, the Aryans in the north, and the Dravidians in the south, and their inter-cultural history over the past four thousand years.

THE LITERATURES

The Vedas

'Veda' means 'knowledge' (from the root *vid*, to know) and is used primarily for 'Divine Knowledge'. According to the Hindus, it is understood to be eternal—antecedent to any oral or written teaching or book. The basic meaning of *Veda*, therefore, is 'uncreated knowledge', similar to that of the word 'wisdom' in the Old Testament. It is only secondarily referred to as the words in which this knowledge is couched: the Scriptures. However, in modern usage, the word always means the sacred Scriptures of the Hindus.

What today is seen as a complex system of varied religious beliefs and practices began with the *Vedas* long ago. The tall, fair-skinned, robust Aryan tribes entered India through the northwest mountain

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passes some four thousand years ago. They came not as invaders but as immigrant tribes, bringing wives, families, flocks and herds with them. Successive waves of immigrants came in at considerable intervals. They retained their tribal organizations and the customs they brought from their homeland. One was to employ bards to celebrate the deeds of their kingly leaders and sing the praises of their gods.

The newcomers did not enter India unopposed. The earlier inhabitants, the people of the Indus Valley, offered stiff resistance. The invading tribal leaders, called *Rajas* (rulers), had to drive back the native inhabitants. Wars ensued and at the close of each war, the Aryan *Rajas* held a *darbar* and the court bard recited hymns composed in praise of his patron's exploits. The *Raja* also performed sacrifices. The sacrificial fire was kindled on ground covered with sacred grass which was chosen to serve as an altar. Clarified butter, milk, grain were poured on the fire and on occasions rams, oxen, and horses were sacrificed. The *soma* plant—no longer seen in India—was pressed with elaborate ritual and the juice drunk. Meanwhile, the officiating priest (*hotri*) chanted sacred verses, or *mantras*. The *mantras* sung by the *hotri* and the hymns sung by the bards have been preserved in the form of collections (*Samhitas*). These are what we know as the *Vedas*. Four collections have come down to us: the *Rig-Veda Samhita*, *Sama-Veda Samhita*, *Yajur-Veda Samhita*, and the *Atharva-Veda Samhita*.

The Rig-Veda. The first collection, the *Rig-Veda* is the basis of Hinduism. Its hymns are addressed to various gods and goddesses, some time between 1500 and 1200 B.C., or a few centuries later. It was arranged in ten books, although the hymns of the first and tenth books are definitely later than the others.

Indological research has worked out with exquisite thoroughness the philology and textual criticism of these ancient compositions. But it is still uncertain about the metaphysical and theological issues involved. The Vedic compositions had many authors and are understood therefore to represent different lines of thought.

God or 'the Divine' is universally accepted as something which human speech could never adequately express nor the imagination of the human mind ever conceive. It is said to breathe by its own power without breath: the 'One Principle', beyond words, given many names by the sages. In some prominent texts of the *Vedas*, the Supreme Principle is said to be neither 'being' nor 'non-being'. 'Being' and

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'non-being' are mere human words, not applicable to God.

What appears to be the Supreme God is addressed in some outstanding texts as our Heavenly Father (*Dyaus Pitar*), the First Cause of all and Lord of all. He is said to encompass the universe with His eternal law. Nothing can escape His vigilant gaze. He is the *hiranyagarbha*, 'The Effulgent First Born', the one by whom all things were made, and the Word (*vac*), exalted as the queen of all creation, who makes the 'Father' known to all men. This primordial Being not only transcends the universe but is immanent in it. At creation, he offered Himself as a Divine Model for man in an allegorical immolation of complete self-sacrifice to set the norm by which all sacrifices may thereafter be ordained and regulated.

This, succinctly, is the first part of the 'Divine Knowledge' the orthodox Hindu has to hear and accept at his initiation into the Hindu tradition. The deeper truths are expected to be imparted only to those truth-seekers who have satisfied a qualified teacher of the *Vedas* that they are worthy and disinterested.

The Brahmanas

As the years passed, the Vedic hymns became an oral tradition which each generation memorized and handed on to the next. Explanations, applications, and ritualistic commentaries were produced so they could be understood. These were intended primarily for the guidance of the Brahmanas (or priests) who used the hymns for rituals. That is why they came to be known as the *Brahmanas*.

These liturgical commentaries were composed between 1200 and 800 B.C. and appended to the several collections of *Samhitas*. They extol the importance and symbolic meaning of various kinds of Vedic sacrifice and preserve a number of ancient memories. They form the second part of Vedic literature and are probably the outcome of the priestly craft.

Aranyakas and Upanishads

Later, not satisfied with the *Brahmanas*, religious men began to expound the mystical sense of the ceremonies and to speculate on the nature of Spirit and God. The books containing these speculations are known as the *Aranyakas* (forest meditations) and *Upanishads* (mystic doctrine). *Aranyakas* means 'belonging to the forest'. It is therefore intended for study in the forest by Brahmanas who have retired from the world's distractions. The *Upanishads* developed out

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of the *Aranyakas* and contain philosophical enquiries which led to the flowering of Hindu philosophy.

This, the third portion of Vedic literature, is closely connected with the *Brahmanas*. Living in idyllic simplicity in the depths of India's tropical forests, the Hindu seers meditated on life and death, the world and men, God and His universe. This portion of the *Veda* was later considered the most important part of the 'Divine Knowledge'. Those who sought the Truth asked profound questions, while the teachers provided even more profound answers. The character of the intellectual research recorded in the *Upanishads* leads oriental scholars to believe that these speculations must have preceded the rise of Buddhism by some centuries. They must therefore belong to a period earlier than 600 B.C. The whole of the *Upanishad* section of the *Vedas* forms a kind of philosophical patrology for the Hindu tradition and is regarded with special reverence.

Sruti and Smriti

The *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishad* are of prime importance to the Hindu tradition. They constitute the sacred scripture called *sruti* (heard) which corresponds to the revealed scriptures of other religions. An orthodox Hindu is one who accepts the *sruti* as revealed.

There is also another category of sacred scripture: the *smriti* ('that which is remembered'). The *smriti* are auxiliary to the *sruti*. Traditionally, they were grouped into five classes: the *Vedangas* (limbs of the *Vedas*), *Dharmashastras*, *Nibandhas* (writings devoted to rituals), *Puranas* (religious stories) and epics (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*). Besides these, there were the *Darshanas* (six schools of philosophy), the *Agamas* (scriptures of certain sectarian groups), and the other incidental literature which also formed a part of the religious literature of Hinduism.

Sutras

When ancient lore began to be treated systematically in the schools and universities of medieval India (500 B.C. to A.D. 1000), concise sentences or *sutras* were selected from the Hindu patristic literature and included in a compendium for scholastic purposes. The sentences themselves date from very early times down to the third century B.C., and since they contained the distilled lore of the previous ages, the teachers commented on them in the schools. The scholastic

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productions of the early days (*circa* 500 B.C. to A.D. 500) are in the style of aphoristic formularies drawn from every conceivable subject found in the *Vedas*.

Vedangas. In the syllabus of Vedic texts, each of the four *Vedas* had a subsidiary *upaveda* (supplement) associated with it. The traditional curriculum prescribed *Vedangas* or courses of special studies for students of Vedic scholarship according to the orthodox method. Thus, the *Vedangas* acquired a sacred character of their own by association with the *Vedas*. The four *Vedas* and six *Vedangas* constitute the normal course of studies expected of the orthodox scholar before he leaves his teacher's roof to take up his duties in the world.

Darshanas. Since no philosophical speculation was indulged in without deference to the tradition regarding the relation of the finite to the infinite preserved in Vedic literature as a whole, Hindu philosophical treatises have generally been classified under six 'points-of-view' (*darshanas*), mutually supplementary in purpose but often enhanced in importance by rival professors so as to produce on the outside observer an impression of separate systems. •

Vedanta. The most important of all philosophical speculations on the central doctrine of the *Veda* is the *Vedanta* (the end of the *Veda*). Orthodox circles proclaim the *Vedanta* the crowning achievement of human speculation, and indeed, the consummation of all knowledge. The *Vedanta* itself has several schools of interpretation. All agree on the unity of the Truth preserved in traditional documents while they disagree at times violently on points of emphasis and interpretation.

THEOLOGICALS

Hindu theologians are the great masters of the *Vedanta*. They have worked out the theological implications of the relation of the finite to the Infinite, i.e., of the soul's relation to God, in minute detail. Thus they have catered to the intellectual cravings of India's cultured classes.

Sankara (eighth century A.D.). The most celebrated champion of orthodox doctrine. He upheld the absolute infinitude of the Supreme Principle (*Brahma*) and tolerated no reality, however significant or insignificant, which cannot be 'reduced' in principle to the Infinite.

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Ramanuja (twelfth century A.D.). He admitted the transcendence of the Infinite, but saw its immanence in the finite. He conceived the infinite in terms of the Ultimate Universal to which every particular reality bears an internal, immanent, and eternal relation, as intimate as the relation between the living body and its inhabiting spirit.

Madhva (twelfth century A.D.). Seeing the irreconcilable gulf between the finite and the Infinite, he rejected Sankara's attempt to reduce the finite to the Infinite, even in absolute principle, if thereby the finite loses its entity. And on the other hand, affirmed (against Ramanuja) the absolute transcendence of the Infinite over the finite so that there can be no question of immanent identity.

Nimbarka (twelfth century A.D.). Continued to explore the immanence of the infinite in the finite, which had troubled both Ramanuja and Madhva, and discovered a real distinction between the finite and the Infinite without compromising the 'principal' identity of the finite and the Infinite.

Vallabha (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries A.D.). He elevated the transitory realities of the world to the seriousness of divine realities by maintaining the 'principal' identity of the finite and the Infinite while affirming the utter reality of the finite which owes its absolute entity to its being in principle identical with the Infinite. Vallabha is the most logically consistent of the Hindu theologians. But his position can be (and has been) misunderstood.

Jivagoswami and Baldeva. Jivagoswami (sixteenth century A.D.) and Baldeva (eighteenth century A.D.) declared the relation of the finite to the Infinite not amenable to intellectual definition and took refuge in utter surrender of the human mind to the will of God as the only tenable attitude when human vision is blinded by excessive light from all that the Infinite implies.

The Puranas

Most of the primordial tradition of the Hindus is preserved, perhaps in distorted form, in what are officially designated ancient writings (*puranas*). These are ancient in subject matter but not in their present recensions. The textually antique literature has been preserved not in the *Puranas* but in the *Vedas*.

The Epics

The common people did not care for theological discussions. They

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were instructed in the tradition through homilies on the deeds and teachings of the saints and heroes of old found in the *puranas*, and especially, in the two extensive encyclopedias of folklore in verse known as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, both of which belong to ancient (partly pre-Buddhistic) times. God is believed to have come down to earth often to help man.

Two occasions are described at great length, one in the *Ramayana*—when God comes in partial manifestation as Rama, the beau-ideal of a warrior prince, and again in the *Mahabharata*, where in the celebrated *Bhagavad-Gita*, in a fuller manifestation, God is the central figure—Krishna, the warrior king—made to expound the orthodox doctrine and defend the cause of righteousness.

THE RELIGION

Vedic Religion

The early period of Hinduism is known as the Vedic period. It covers the approximate time between 2000 and 500 B.C., a span of fifteen hundred years. Included are three stages: the age of the *Rig-Veda*, of the *Brahmanas*, and of the *Upanishads*.

Theism of the Rig-Veda. The *Rig-Veda* is the world's oldest religious text. It is Hinduism's earliest written document. The efforts of the Aryans by which the personified forces of nature were worshipped as gods, such as thunder (*Indra*), wind (*Vayu*), fire (*Agni*), sun (*Surya*), dawn (*Usha*), were portrayed. There was therefore a belief in many gods (polytheism) but at the same time, one was considered the greatest (henotheism). At one time it was Indra and at another Varuna and so on. Later, a strong tendency arose to combine the functions of the various gods into one Supreme Deity (monotheism).

Worship of images (icons), characteristic of later Hinduism, is not found in the *Rig-Veda*. Nor is there any mention of rebirth (*karma* and *samsara*)—fundamental doctrines in later Hinduism. The Vedic people conceived of the universe as three-layered. The gods lived mainly in the upper regions; men on the earth below. There was also an underworld in which the god of death and the demons lived. Man was a member of his clan or tribe, but there was no caste system nor prohibition against eating meat. The principal difference between gods and men was that the gods were immortal, while men were mortal. The Vedic peoples believed that man's miserable condition

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in this world (due to death, disease, famine, etc.), came from the actions of the gods in response to their own failure to offer prayers and sacrifices.

Although they believed in a life after death, the Rig-Vedic people were not concerned about it very much. Their great concern was with success, happiness, and prosperity in this life. Varuna, the custodian god of *rita* (physical and moral order) watched over the conduct of men and gods. He rewarded the good; punished the wicked. He also forgave ethical shortcomings. Thus, the religion presented in the *Rig-Veda* was a simple one. But it contains the core of Hinduism, for it is the seed from which Hinduism grew.

Ritualism of the Brahmanas. As time passed, the simple Vedic religion grew into one with complicated rites and rituals. In the Rig-Vedic age, we saw that the gods were considered to be in control of both the natural and the moral orders. It was therefore thought that they had to be propitiated by means of sacrifices. Gradually, sacrifice grew in importance as the primary device for maintaining the harmony of peoples' lives. The rituals became more elaborate. The importance of sacrificial ceremonies lifted the priesthood to social prominence. Society was gradually divided into four classes: priests, warriors, commoners, and serfs. But the rituals and ceremonies became much more elaborate and began to cloud the real religious issues. A reaction against this overemphasis on sacrificial rituals set in and in the Upanishadic period Hinduism took a contemplative turn.

Speculations of the Upanishads. Svetaketu Arunya was the son of a sage. His father said to him, 'Live the life of a student of sacred knowledge. Verily, my dear, there is no one from our family unlearned, a Brahman by connection, as it were.'

Having become a pupil at the age of twelve and studied all the Vedas, he then returned at the age of twenty-four, conceited, thinking himself learned.

Then his father said to him, 'Svetaketu, my dear, since you are now conceited, think yourself learned, and are proud—did you also ask for that teaching whereby what has not been heard of becomes heard of, what has not been understood becomes understood?'

'What, pray sir, is that teaching?'

'Just as by one piece of clay, my dear, everything made of clay may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name, the reality is just clay.'

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‘Just as by one copper ornament, my dear, everything made of copper may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name, the reality is just *copper*.

‘Just as by one nail-clipper, my dear, everything made of iron may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name, the reality is just *iron*—so, my dear, is that teaching.’

‘Verily, those honoured men did not know this; for, if they had known it, why would they have not told me? But, sir, do you tell me this.’

‘So be it, my dear,’ said he.

‘In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being (*sat*), only one, without a second. To be sure, some people say: “In the beginning this world was just Non-being (*a-sat*), only one, without a second; from that Non-being Being was produced.”¹

‘But verily, my dear, whence could this be?’ said he. ‘How from non-being could Being be produced? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was just Being, only one, without a second.’

‘Bring hither a fig from there.’

‘Here it is, sir.’

‘Divide it.’

‘It is divided, sir.’

‘What do you see there?’

‘These rather fine seeds, sir.’

‘Of these, please divide one.’

‘It is divided, sir.’

‘What do you see there?’

‘Nothing at all, sir.’

Then he said to him: ‘Verily, my dear, that finest essence which you do not perceive—verily, my dear, from that finest essence this great Nyagrodha (sacred fig) tree thus arises.’

‘Believe me, my dear,’ said he, ‘that which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Ātman (Soul). That art thou, Svetaketu.’²

This and other passages which record the mystic experiences of Ultimate Reality in the *Upanishads* have stimulated philosophical thinking throughout India’s history. The *Upanishads* have enriched Hinduism with a wealth of religious concepts.

The emphasis of the *Upanishads* revolves around the relationship between God (*brahman*) and the Soul (*atman*). In the mentioned

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passage, the Upanishadic emphasis is directed towards showing that the Ultimate Reality, God, is one, without a second.

In certain places, this has been brought out by saying that in the beginning there was only One and this One desired to be many and it therefore created many by mere thought or by a word.

It is brought out in other places, however, by saying that plurality is only apparent and not 'really true'. The reality of the world is but an illusion (*maya*), a dream.

There are also places where Reality is spoken of in terms of being constituted by God—soul and matter, in a pantheistic sense.

To the Hindus, ignorance of the One Reality was 'bondage'. As long as one continues to see multiplicity and fails to see the One behind it, one is involved in the process of *samsara* (bondage), which in the Upanishadic view is repeated births and deaths. It should be noted that only in the *Upanishads* is the doctrine of rebirth fully expressed for the first time.

Deliverance from the bondage (*moksha*) is brought by a true knowledge of the self and its relation to *brahman*. It is attained through the process of contemplation under the guidance of a teacher (*guru*) who imparts the spiritual knowledge like *tattvam asi* ('that thou art'). As long as this knowledge is not realized, one's involvement in *samsara* continues (the bondage of births, deaths, and rebirths).

POST-VEDIC HINDUISM: THE OFF-SHOOTS, BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

While Hinduism rose to great heights of metaphysical insight during the Upanishadic period, at the popular level it was very much tied to ritualistic practices. The excessive concern with ritualism soon led to a large number of people being attracted to Buddhism and Jainism.

In the years from 600 to 200 B.C., two religious leaders had appeared on the scene: Buddha and Mahavira. They founded two new world religions: Buddhism, and Jainism and both insisted on good moral living. They rejected the authority of the *Vedas*, Vedic ritualism and brahminical superiority in religious matters. In addition, the political situation in India contributed to the development of Buddhism. It was the period when the Maurya dynasty was established by Chandragupta Maurya and this dynasty gave India one of the world's greatest emperors, Ashoka. A Buddhist, he made Buddhism the dominant religion in India.

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Revival through Epics

After Ashoka, in the period from 185 B.C. to A.D. 300, Hinduism revived. This is traditionally known as the Epic period, because of the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which became the most influential religious literature of the period. A part of the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, has been the source of spiritual inspiration to innumerable Hindus and non-Hindus alike.

The *Gita* opens on the battlefield. The third Pandava Prince, Arjuna, is stricken with doubt and compassion before a fratricidal war begins. Krishna, an incarnation (*avatara*) of Vishnu (one of the Gods) is his charioteer. Krishna tells Arjuna that fighting for justice is part of one's religious duty and as one belonging to the warrior caste he should fight and thus perform his duty without thought of the consequences. He must train his mind and body by *yoga* and do his duty without hope of reward or fear of danger. The body may die but the soul is indestructible. This is the *yoga* of 'desireless' action (*nishkama karma*) taught by Krishna on the battlefield of the Mahabharata War.

Bhakti Yoga

In the Vedic times, the way to obtain release from *samsara* (the world of birth and rebirth, or bondage) was through sacrifice and priestly ritual. This is known as the way of work (*karma*). As a result of Upanishadic teaching, a second way was made known, the way of knowledge (*jnana marga*). These two ways of achieving release from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth were restrictive, however, rather than universal in scope. The way of the ritual and sacrifice implied that only Brahmans could attain *moksha* (release). The way of knowledge of the *Upanishads* was for the learned few. Thus, what was needed was a way for all to attain *moksha* (release). This need was met by the way of salvation through devotion to God. It was known as the way of *bhakti* (devotion).

The way of *bhakti* (devotion) was in principle open to all. It was built around the statement of Krishna in the *Gita*: 'In whatever form you worship me, in that form I strengthen your faith.' It was at this time that the worship of images in the temples gained prominence. Here the two gods of the Hindu pantheon, Vishnu and Siva, along with Sakti, became prominent. The doctrine of Incarnations (*avataras*) also gained importance as part of *bhakti*. The incarnations of Rama and Krishna took hold of the mind and hearts

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of the people through the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This revival in Hinduism grew to such proportions that it spread into distant places like Sumatra, Java, Malaya, and Indo-China.

Golden Age of Hinduism

The fourth to ninth centuries of the Christian Era make up the Gupta Era in Indian history. Hinduism became so vigorous, its cultural expressions so classic, that this is the 'Golden Age of Hindu culture' in the minds of the historians. It is the time of the *Puranas* (religious stories), popular piety dealing with the deities and heroes which brought great satisfaction to ordinary religious people. It was also a period of philosophical systems. The six philosophical schools came to prominence. Among them were the *Nyaya*, the *Vaiseshika*, the *Samkya*, the *Yoga*, the *Mimamsa*, and the *Vedanta*.

The great philosopher Sankara (788-820) contributed a great deal to Hindu philosophy. Brahman by birth, he renounced the world early in life and as a religious teacher travelled all over India. He established five monasteries which are active even today. His philosophy is called *Advaita Vedanta*. He renewed the spirit of the *Upanishads* and was instrumental in arresting the influence of heterodox religions like Buddhism and their philosophical systems. Sankara was followed by other philosophers like Ramanuja and Madhva.

The Golden Age of Hinduism received a setback in the years that followed. The political rivalries at home and the invasions of Muslims from without shook the foundations of Hinduism. However, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there was a revival of *bhakti*, centered around the devotion of the incarnations of Vishnu, Rama, and Krishna. A number of ascetic groups, especially in Saivism, came to be formed in this period. These movements tended in general to neglect the Hindu caste system and ritualism.

Modern Hinduism

In some ways, Hinduism is a paradoxical religion. It is liberal, yet conservative. Its liberalism flows from the doctrinal freedom given to its followers, which was allowed at times even to the point of denying the authority of the *Vedas*. Its conservatism arises from the fact that one remains a Hindu only as long as one does not break away completely from the accepted norms and regulations of Hindu society. In the course of the centuries, a large number of Hindu sects were permitted to adopt with little change even the leading

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doctrines of heretical religions. There were complaints no doubt and objections from time to time but there were no marked upheavals. 'Hindu identity' came to rest mainly on social and individual duties, predominantly caste duties.

A new type of liberalism appeared in the nineteenth century. It was the direct result of the impact made by the teaching of Christian missionaries and western education including science and history. As this liberal movement acquired momentum, it made deep inroads into traditional structures. Several reform movements sprang up to give new directions and attempted to include the elements that had gained momentum and importance.

The Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj is an important movement within modern Hinduism, not because of the number of its members, but because of its influence. It was founded in Calcutta in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohun Roy. He studied all the major religions of the world and found a spiritual core common to all. He was therefore moved to organize a religious society devoted to the essence of every religious faith. Accordingly, he denounced all forms of polytheism and idolatry and advocated purging Hinduism of these elements. In seeking to formulate a universal religion, he gave up many of the general beliefs of Hinduism, such as the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Hinduism now took on a dynamic role. There was less insistence on the worship of images and of many gods. All reformers continue to stand for a universal religion based on the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

The Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj is a movement which has found many adherents in India. Its clarion call was 'back to the *Vedas*'. It was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. He arrived at the conviction that the religion of the *Vedas* is the oldest and purest of all religions. The *Vedas*, he taught, were a direct revelation from the one God, and properly understood, do not teach either polytheism or pantheism. He stressed the revealed truths of the *Vedas* and called for a return to the ancient purified Aryan way of life.

Ramakrishna Mission. A group of Hindus gathered around Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886), a Hindu mystic, who taught the unity of all religions within the context of Vedantic Hinduism. One of his disciples, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) visited the United

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States and lectured there for ten years. He founded missions to spread the message of *Vedanta*. In India, Vivekananda laid stress on social reforms and the necessity of up-grading the economic and educational levels of India by establishing schools, hospitals, and other institutions of mercy.

Gandhiji. Hinduism has constantly proved itself capable of absorbing new teachings and today it has taken over the practical gospel of social service. Mahatma Gandhi, in his struggles, first in South Africa and then with the British Indian government, evolved his teaching of non-violence (*ahimsa*), with which he not only fought for independence but also worked for the uplift of the outcastes, whom he called the people of God (*Harijans*). He also worked for the religious regeneration of the Hindu masses by his prayer meetings. 'Hinduism today is full of life and dynamism. It contains in its fold many religious groups, able academicians, different Vedantic scholars, a variety of yogas, free-lance spiritual adventurers and, of course, the religious leaders of the orthodox institutions. There is also a desire among the intelligentsia to understand their heritage better and imbibe them. The religious discourses have become increasingly popular and the enthusiasm that we see in the Hindu community today undoubtedly convinces us that this great heritage which has remained a source of inspiration and guidance in the past will be the precious possession of every Hindu and will continue to inspire and guide his actions for ever.'¹³

NOTES

1. Das, Govinda, *Hinduism*, Natesan & Co., Madras, 1924., p. 45.
2. Hume, R.E., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1975, pp. 240-1, 247-8.
3. Sundararajan, K.R., *Hinduism*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969, p. 15.

CHAPTER IV

Evolution of Monotheism in the Hindu Tradition

Go forth, go forth, upon the path so ancient,
By which our fathers reached their home in heaven.
There Varuna shalt thou behold.

RV.I.14

Where men devout in blessedness are dwelling,
Where life to life succeeds for righteous spirits,
And each is fuller than the last in beauty.

RV.I.154

THE RIG-VEDA

Present day historical researches show that the early religious thought of India is known or deduced from the archaeological evidences such as seals, figurines, tablets and other artifacts belonging to what is now known as the Indus Valley civilization of the third millenium B.C. But the only conclusions that could be gathered with any certainty from these discoveries are that there was (i) a pre-occupation with fertility symbols; (ii) the worship of a divinity similar to God Siva, the ascetic god of historic Hinduism, (iii) perhaps the worship of certain animals and (iv) a suggestion that the origin of religious ideas went back even earlier than the datable artifacts of the Indus Valley civilization, as substantiated by certain seals and motifs.

It is certainly difficult to establish a definite continuity in the development of religious ideas in India dating from the Indus Valley civilization to modern times. However, in admitting a non-Aryan source to many of the concepts, which characterize the religion of what is known as 'Hinduism', one cannot in any way deny the established historical fact that, whether in the Vedic age or in our twentieth century, the Indian mind has been moving towards a direction given by the *Vedas*.

This unifying principle which runs through all aspects of Indian life and temperament and which has permeated most of the strata of

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Indian society is seen in every little act the Indians perform, whether those acts be religious or philosophical, moral or literary, social or political.

Whatever might have been the real excellence of the civilization of the Vedic age, the generations of people who came after that age believed that the Vedic people had attained a higher level of knowledge, power and social maturity than the people of later ages. This recognition of the excellence of the Vedic age made the people of the subsequent ages attempt to model their lives on those lines. Therefore, in the periods that followed, all those things that were valuable in man's life, namely philosophy, religion, sciences and even codes of conduct were traced back to the *Vedas*.

All later intellectual activities of Indian thinkers, to a great extent, have been attempts to present some aspect or other of Vedic thought. All that Brahmanism afterwards claimed to be was the inheritance of the Vedic traditions. The entire mythology of the later period is based on the Vedic period. All the stories narrated in the later *Puranas* about Vishnu, Siva and Indra have their root in Vedic mythology. The main philosophical doctrines are the outcome of the Vedic conceptions and the philosophical systems in Hinduism are the natural growth of the Vedic conceptions of nature, the end of man and his relation to the universe. In fact, the philosophy of the *Vedas* was all embracing. The entire Sanskrit literature of later ages records the attempts of ancient Indians to understand the Vedic civilization, to revive the Vedic culture and to approximate their lives to the ideals of Vedic civilization.

All religions which were born in India and all the sects of Hinduism owe great debt to the *Vedas*—in fact, their very existence to the *Vedas*. Their origin can be traced to the progressive development and evolution of the Vedic religion.

God Varuna

The religion of the four *Vedas*, when we take it as a whole, is concerned with the worship of gods representing mainly the personifications of nature. This polytheism assumes a pantheistic colouring towards the end with only one exception: the Varuna hymns. The great German Vedic scholar Max Müller, who discovered it, gave it the name of henotheism, but some Indian scholars still hold it to be the monotheism of Vedic times. But whatever the name we give it we must admit the existence of the idea of 'One Supreme God' in

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the *Rig-Veda*, whether that was conceived Supreme for a time (henotheism) or for ever as 'One above all' (monotheism). The sages have expressed it by saying: 'Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti' (*RV*.2, 164.46) which is translated as: 'That which IS, is One; sages describe it in manifold ways or 'He is One, (though) wise men call Him by many names'.' It is this idea of 'One Supreme, Transcendental Being' which has led the minds of its readers in search of the 'nature' of the One and come to the various conclusions found in the *Upanishads*. But in the *Rig-Veda*, itself, it could not be a metaphysical One, it could only be a religious One, as it is clear from Sankara who says, 'But the Lord, about whom ordinary experience tells us nothing, is to be considered as the special topic of all texts of *Sruti*.'¹ Indeed, '*Sruti* is an authority only in matters not perceived by means of perception and other ordinary *pramanas*. A hundred *Srutis* may declare that fire is cold or dark; still, they possess no authority in that matter'.² Hence, those propositions alone which directly refer to Brahman possess primacy and independent authority.³ Therefore, Dr Radhakrishnan had no hesitation in affirming that 'we have the essentials of the highest theism in the worship of Varuna. If *bhakti* means faith in a personal God, Love for Him, dedication of everything to His service and the attainment of moksha or freedom by personal devotion, surely we have all these elements in Varuna-worship.'⁴

Professor Bloomfield argues that 'if Varuna had prevailed, India would have become monotheistic and theocratic which it never did'.⁵ Andrew Lang, referring to the Varuna hymns, says: 'It would be difficult to overstate the ethical nobility of certain Vedic hymns, which even now affects us with a sense of the "hunger and thirst after righteousness" so passionately felt by the Hebrew Psalmists'.⁶

Not a few scholars consider Varuna the loftiest figure in the world of gods and goddesses. 'If we combine into one all the attributes of sovereign power and majesty, which we find in other gods, we will have the god Varuna.'⁷ Dr Hopkins claims that 'Varuna beside the loftiest figures in the Hellenistic pantheon stands like a god beside a man'.⁸

Others see in Varuna an Indian Yahweh. Dr Macdonell writes, 'Varuna is invoked in far fewer hymns than Indra, Agni, or Soma, but he is undoubtedly the greatest of the Vedic gods by the side of Indra.' While Indra is the great warrior, Varuna is the great upholder of physical and moral order (*rita*). The hymns addressed to him are more ethical and devout in tone than any others: They form the

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most exalted portion of the *Veda*, often resembling in character the Hebrew psalms.⁹ Continuing in the same strain, Dr Griswold says, 'As Ahura Mazda represented the actuality of ethical monotheism in ancient Iran, so Varuna represented its possibility in ancient India. If the one may be rightly called the Iranian Yahweh, the other with almost equal justice may be called "the Indian Yahweh".'¹⁰ Professor Raffaele Pettazzoni also agrees with the view that Varuna represents the Yahweh of India.¹¹

It may be asked here, what is it that makes these scholars consider Varuna as closely approximating to the western concept of a monotheistic God? The answer lies in his transcendence, his righteousness and his characteristics as a merciful and forgiving God.

In the hymns that have come down to us in the *Rig-Veda*, we find that the idea of transcendence is expressed in far clearer terms than any other notion. In those almost legendary prehistoric times, human thought functioned in ways far removed from ours. It preferred to express itself in images and symbols that are hard enough to translate and even harder to interpret. Yet, the discerning mind is struck with the telling expressions in which the songs of praise to various Vedic deities reveal the idea of a transcendent god. Here are some examples.

In the first book of *Rig-Veda*, the Rishi, Sunahsepa, addressing God Varuna sings:

Ne'er have those birds that fly through air attained
To thy high dominion or thy might or spirit;
Nor these the waters that flow on for ever,
Nor hills abaters of the wind's wild fury. *RV. I. 24.6*

These verses describe Varuna as someone beyond the flight of birds, beyond the utmost surge of the waters, beyond the farthest reach of wind-breaking mountains. In other words, he is beyond the earth, beyond the seas and beyond the sky. He is the unattainable One, highly exalted beyond all that is earthly.

Furthermore, Varuna is often called *Aditya*, which means the boundless, Infinite, from 'a' (not) and 'diti' (bound). According to Max Müller, it is the endless expanse beyond the earth, beyond the clouds, beyond the sky. Again, because Varuna was considered Infinite and all other beings finite and limited, so they could not be identified with Varuna. They were in him and were supported by

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him but they were not identically one with him. This was expressed by the words:

‘On him three heavens rest and are supported,
and the three earths are there in sixfold order.’ *RV. VII. 87.5*

By these words Rishis expressed the separate entity of Varuna from other finite things, just as the container is distinct from the contained. Therefore he is not one of the gods, he is above the gods. The gods obey and follow his command. The Vedic seer, after saying that ‘he contemplates the tribes of gods and all the works of mortal men’ (*RV. VIII.41.7*) and that ‘all gods follow his decrees’ (*RV. VIII.41.7*), in answer, as it were, to a question from someone in the audience who asked, ‘What is the difference between Varuna and other Gods’?, replies, ‘He (Varuna) is an ocean far-removed’ (*RV. VIII.41.8*). The poet could not have expressed better the transcendence of God than by the words ‘He is an ocean far-removed from all others’.

In the same way, the immanence of God is referred to in many hymns. The twenty-fifth hymn of the first book is a graphic description of the omniscience of Varuna as we shall presently see. He knows the flight of birds, the path of ships, and the course of winds. He beholds all the secret deeds of men. He knows the past, present and the future, far and near; and as such, he cannot be deceived (*RV. VII.86.4; I.25.14; II.28.8*). He knows even the winking of men’s eyes (*AV. IV.16.5*). Whatever thing two sitting down together talk about, Varuna as a third knows it (*AV. IV.16.2*). Together with the omniscience of Varuna, his omnipresence is emphasized in such words as:

This earth too, belongs to Varuna, the king
and this wide sky with its ends far apart.
The two seas (the sky and the ocean) are Varuna’s lions:
he is also contained in this small drop of water. *AV. IV. 16*

Like the psalmist of the Old Testament

If I should climb up to heaven, thou art there;
If I sink down to the world beneath, thou art present still.
Ps. 138. 8

the Vedic sage sings,

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He who should flee beyond the sky,
even he would not rid of Varuna, the king. *AV. IV. 16.4*

In the words of A. B. Keith: the omniscience and omnipotence, no less than the omnipresence of Varuna receive admirable expression in the 16th hymn of the fourth book of *Atharva-Veda*.¹²

In the eighty-eighth hymn of the seventh book of the *Rig-Veda* the poet, Vasishtha, is forsaken by Varuna on account of some sin. He calls to mind the bygone days when he walked with his God so happily. He recounts the scene when, either in reality or in an ecstasy, he sailed with Varuna in a vessel and received a sacred appointment to prophecy. But now he has fallen from this exalted friendship with his God and he asks for forgiveness and restoration to divine favour. The poet addresses himself in the third person.

Present to Varuna thine hymn, Vasishtha, bright,
most delightful to the bounteous giver,
Who bringeth on to us the Bull, the lofty, the holy,
laden with a thousand treasures. 1
And now, as I am come before his presence, Varuna's
face of flame will I remember,
That he may bring—Lord also of the darkness—
the light in heaven that I may see its beauty. 2
When Varuna and I embarked together and urged
our boat into the midst of ocean,
When we rode o'er the ridges of the waters, we
swung within that swing and we were happy. 3
Varuna placed Vasishtha in the vessel, and deftly
with his might made him a Rishi.
When days shone bright the sage made him a singer,
while the heavens broadened and the Dawns were lengthened. 4
What hath become of those our ancient friendships,
when without enmity we walked together?
O Varuna, thou glorious lord, I entered thy lofty home,
thine house with thousand portals.
If he thy true ally hath sinned against these still,
Varuna, he is the friend thou lovedst.
Let us not, Living one, as sinners, know thee: give shelter,
as a sage, to him who lauds thee 6

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While we abide in these fixed habitations, and from
the lap of Aditi win favour,
May Varuna untie the bond that binds us. 7

This hymn reads like a mystic poem, a lyric of high order. The kernel of the hymn lies in verses 3 to 6. The singer believes that he has been forsaken by his helper Varuna: with anguish he remembers his communion with the god in former times. In a vision he sees himself translated into Varuna's realm, he goes sailing with the god: he is called to be Rishi or holy singer to the god, and he is in his palace with him. Now, Varuna has withdrawn his favour, yet let him have mercy on his singer, and not punish him so grievously for his sin. The hymn perhaps originally closed with verse six.¹³

The hymn contains two pictures of the intimacy which Vasishtha enjoyed with Varuna, (i) when he was in a boat at sea alone with Varuna, and (ii) when as the guest of Varuna he had free access to his thousand portalled house. But alas! this intimacy was broken through sin, and so there is a prayer for forgiveness:

If he thy true ally hath sinned against thee, still,
Varuna, he is the friend thou lovedst.
Let us not, Living one, as sinners, know thee: give
shelter, as a sage, to him who lauds thee. 6

In the description of Varuna, he is shown as one who leads out the lofty Bull (sun), like the one in Psalm 19.4 and 5 of the Bible.

He has set a tent in the sea for the sun
which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

Varuna's face is like that of fire. He says, 'When I contemplate Varuna, his face seems to me like a blazing fire' (v. 2). Finally, Varuna is a *personal god*. Communion with Varuna, intimacy with him, walking together in friendship, Varuna taking Vasishtha in a ship and travelling together on the ocean, all these leave us with no doubt about the poet's concept of God as a personal god. Varuna is a person. He loves men and is lovable. Sin breaks this bond of love and friendship.

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The twenty-fifth hymn of the first book of the *Rig-Veda*¹³ is but a continuation of the same idea of God, expressed more forcefully and continued with the description of the other attributes of Varuna.

Sunahsepa continues to extol Varuna for *his holiness* and for *his mercy* towards sinners. Then in a wonderfully picturesque way, he describes Varuna's three great attributes: *his omniscience*, *his omnipotence* and *his absolute supremacy*. Finally, the whole hymn is pervaded with such a personal note that it is hardly possible to doubt that Varuna is a *personal god*.

Since the interpolation of stanza six is so evident,¹⁴ we omit it from the hymn. Following Delbruck and others, we have divided the hymn into four strophes containing five stanzas each. This is one of the most famous of Varuna hymns from religious as well as from literary points of view.¹⁵

I

Whatever law of thine, O god, O Varuna, as we are men,	
Day after day we violate,	1
Give us not as a prey to death, to be destroyed by thee in wrath	
To thy fierce anger when displeased.	2
To gain thy mercy, Varuna, with hymns we bind thy heart, as binds	
The charioteer his tethered horse.	3
They flee from me dispirited, bent only on obtaining wealth,	
As to their nests the birds of air.	4
When shall we bring, to be appeased, the hero, lord of warrior	
might,	
Him, the far-seeing Varuna?	5

II

He knows the path of birds that fly through heaven, and	
sovrän of the sea,	
He knows the ships that are thereon.	7
True to his holy law, he knows the twelve moons with their progeny:	
He knows the moon of later birth.	8
He knows the pathway of the wind, the spreading, high,	
and mighty wind;	
He knows the gods who dwell above.	9
Varuna, true to holy law, sits down among his people; he,	
Most wise, sits there to govern all.	10
From thence perceiving he beholds all wondrous things,	
both what hath been,	
And what hereafter will be done.	11

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III

May that Aditya very wise, make fair paths for us all our days:
May he prolong our lives for us. 12
Varuna, wearing golden mail, hath clad him in a shining robe:
His spies are seated round about. 13
The God whom enemies threaten not, those who tyrannize o'er men,
Nor those whose minds are bent on wrong. 14
He who gives glory to mankind, not glory that is incomplete,
To our own bodies giving it. 15
Yearning for the wide-seeing one, my thoughts move onward unto him,
As kine unto their pastures move. 16

IV

Once more together let us speak, because my meath is brought:
priest-like
Thou eatest what is dear to thee. 17
Now saw I him whom all may see, I saw his car above the earth:
Longing for help I cried to thee. 19
Thou, O wise God, art lord of all, thou art the king of earth
and heaven:
Hear, as thou goest on thy way. 20
Release us from the upper bond, untie the bond between and loose
The bonds below, that I may live. 21

Varuna is a Holy and Just God. The poet begins his hymn by humbling himself, by a confession of his own weak nature and of his proneness to sin, to the violations of Varuna's holy laws: 'O Varuna, as we are men, we violate day after day whatever law of thine' (v. 1).

So we deserve death, the punishment for sin, because sin displeases Varuna, the holy god and makes him angry: 'Give us not as a prey to death, to be destroyed by thee in wrath, to thy fierce anger when displeased' (v. 2). Let us note here the use of the words 'fierce anger when displeased'. Sin is a *displeasure*. Varuna hates it and becomes angry and punishes it with death.

Varuna is a Merciful God. Varuna has a heart. He is a loving God. Therefore, to obtain pardon for our sins, we bind His heart; we appeal to His love and mercy with prayers: 'To gain thy mercy, Varuna, with hymns we bind thy heart' (v. 3). But the poet knows his human nature and confesses that even in his prayers he is weak, because his thoughts are wild and unruly, seeking only earthly things

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and not soaring high. How beautifully he expresses it by two metaphors—one of the unruly horse, and another of the birds, which instead of soaring high into heaven fly to their earthly nests. He says, 'My prayers or hymns "flee from me dispirited, bent only on obtaining wealth, as to their nests the birds of air"' (v. 4). The second metaphor compares the hymns to the horse: 'with hymns we bind thy heart, as the charioteer binds his tethered horse' (v. 5).

'We are therefore weak', the poet says, 'and we do not know when we shall be able to appease you. Hence we appeal to your mercy 'When shall we bring Him, the far-seeing Varuna to be appeased' (v. 5).

Varuna is an All-knowing God. Now the words 'far-seeing Varuna' suggest to the poet that he sings of Varuna's Omniscience, and he does it so beautifully. He knows everything. Is there anything that Varuna does not know?

He knows the path of birds that fly through heaven,
He knows the ships that float on the water of the sea v. 7

'He knows the twelve moons with their progeny', that is, the twelve months with the days which are their offspring (v. 9).¹⁶

'He knows the moon of later birth' (v. 8), that is, the thirteenth, the supplementary or intercalary month of the luni-solar year.¹⁷

'He knows the pathway of the wind' (v. 9). Therefore, he knows everything that belongs to nature, and still more He knows what happens in heaven: 'He knows the gods who dwell above'.

Finally, he knows men, their thoughts, their past, present and future. Perceiving and beholding all these, He is able to govern them.

'Varuna sits down among his people' (v. 10). 'From thence perceiving he beholds all wondrous things, both what hath been and what hereafter will be done' (v. 11). Thus, being omniscient, he governs all sweetly and wisely. 'He most wise, sits there to govern all' (v. 10).

Varuna is All-powerful Varuna's knowledge is useless unless he is powerful enough to make use of it. Therefore, the poet paints his might and calls him the 'lord of might' (v. 5). Since he is the Lord of power, he is omnipotent. The picture of omnipotence is drawn in a concrete way, as of a mighty oriental potentate. 'Varuna, wearing a

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golden mail, hath clad (himself) in a shining robe: his spies¹⁸ seated round about' (v. 13). And by his might, he orders things sweetly, 'makes fair paths for us all our days' (v. 12). The prolongation of our lives depends on his will, 'May he prolong our lives for us' (v. 12).

His power is so absolute that no one can harm him or his work. He has enemies, no doubt, the evil spirits 'those, whose minds are bent on wrong' (v. 14). But they cannot challenge him: 'the god, whom enemies threaten not' (v. 14). Their victims are men. Their minds being perverted: 'Whose minds are bent on wrong' (v. 14), they have evil designs on men. They want to rule over them, to tyrannize them: 'those who tyrannize o'er men' (v. 14).

These perverted beings, (the evil spirits), seeing that they can do no harm to Varuna, turn to men to harm them; but Varuna will not abandon them. He will bring them to victory and glory 'He who gives glory to mankind' (v. 15). The glory again will not be a transitory one; it will be a lasting one. It will not be an incomplete one. It will be full. The happiness of men will be full, exceedingly great: 'not glory that is incomplete, to our own bodies giving it' (v. 15).

The sacred bard of the *Rig-Veda*, contemplating the mercy of Varuna for mankind and his omnipotence, sings one of those most beautiful *mantras*, which expresses his intense longing (yearning) for God, the All-knowing One.

Yearning for the wide-seeing one,
my thoughts move onward unto him,
As kine unto their pastures move. v. 16

Varuna is the Supreme God. Once more the Rishi approaches Varuna. But now he approaches him as a priest with oblations and requests Varuna to choose and accept what is dear to him and then to be gracious enough to grant him an audience, that is, to converse with him: 'Once more let us speak together' (v. 17).

Because, priest-like, my 'meath' (honey, *madhu*, that is, the libation of *soma*-juice) is brought: 'Thou attest what is dear to thee' (v. 17), 'Varuna, hear this call of mine: be gracious unto us this day' (v. 19).

Varuna grants the poet his request and becomes visible to the mental eye of his worshipper.¹⁹ The poet is in ecstasy and cries out:

He hath accepted my songs v. 18
Now I saw him whom all may see,

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I saw his car above the earth v. 18

Thou, O wise god, art lord of all,
thou art the king of earth and heaven v. 20

What a magnificent confession of the supremacy of god Varuna!

Finally, before Varuna withdraws from this intimacy, his worshipper, Sunahsepa, the Rishi, has a last request to make, and that is that he will save him from sin and its punishments so that he may *live*:

Longing for help I cried to thee v. 19

Hear, as thou goest on thy way v. 20

Release us from the upper bond,
untie the bond between,
and loose the bonds below,
that I may live v. 21

We have noticed the same *mantra* in the previous hymn (v. 15). According to Sayana, it means 'the ligatures fastening the head, the waist and the feet. But the bonds of sin are here intended.'²⁰ In the first hymn it was, 'may we, made sinless, belong to Aditi'. Here it is, 'that I may live', Aditi being infinite, it means that 'being made pure, sinless, we may live for ever'.

Varuna is a Personal God. In the whole hymn, the anthropomorphism of Varuna's personality is so well-developed that it cannot but strike our eye. He eats (v. 17), sits (v. 10), wears golden mail, is clad in shining robes (v. 13), sees (v. 11), hears (vv. 19, 20), knows (vv. 3, 5). Hence Varuna was in no way conceived as an impersonal principle or the Absolute or the Self but as a person, possessed of knowledge and love, kindness and mercy.

Thus, we see the many traits of a monotheistic God in Varuna. He is the supreme God—transcendent and immanent; righteous and holy; rewarding the just and punishing the wicked; a personal God, who is kind, merciful and loving. Hence, we may justifiably conclude that during the time of the *Rig-Veda*, there existed many gods and goddesses. But in spite of this plurality of gods, there was a tendency and effort on the part of individuals and families of people, as archaeology, prehistory and the Vedic hymns have shown us, to worship one Supreme Being and assert the existence of one only God beyond the many gods and goddesses.

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Anthropology came to the help of these historians and proved beyond doubt, that the Supreme Being formed an essential part of primitive religions. Among the Vedic people, the Supreme Being stands outside and above the nature-myths, yet that Supreme Being was deeply entangled in them. The great scholar Von Schroeder, in his book, *Arische Religion*, has established the existence of a moral Supreme Being among these people. His demonstration was certainly much stronger than the creators of the Nature-myth school of the last century.²¹

In his whole nature, in the exalted dignity and majesty of his appearance, in his attributes as creator, orderer, upholder and governor of the world, in his spotless purity and cleanness, in the holy anger with which he judges and punishes the wicked, in his grace and mercy towards the penitent—in all this, says Schroeder, Varuna appears as a real Supreme Being.²²

Thus, in the whole pantheon of Indian divinities, Varuna's resemblance to the monotheistic God of other traditions is the strongest. He stands parallel to the Yahweh of Hebrew literature.

The Brahmanas

Passing from the *Rig-Veda* to the other three *Vedas* and the *Brahmanas*, the religious phase of Hinduism takes a different turn altogether. The closest approximation we had to a real ethical theism in the worship of Varuna begins to fade and the great figure of Varuna recedes into the background. Just as it is said in the ancient Hebrew tradition that the people of Israel forsook Jehovah for Baal, so also in India the worshippers of Varuna forsook Varuna for Indra. While among the Hebrews the prophets arose to warn and bring back the people to Jehovah, unfortunately in India the interaction of so many religious influences, varied as the varieties of human nature and human needs and complicated still more by the intermixture of alien and native races, left no opportunity perhaps for the rise of prophets. Yet, as Dr Macnicol points out, 'We may indeed be confident that no period in Indian religious history was without some elements at least of what we mean by Theism.'²³

Indra might in time have acquired sole divine status, since the combined powers he acquired were logically those of a monotheistic god. But the Aryan fire sacrifice, started as a hospitality rite to the gods, wherein the divine guests were honoured with food, gifts and hymns of praise sung by the poet-priests, took such a disproportion-

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ate importance that centuries of priestly concentration on the sacrificial ritual brought about a new view of reality.

Between the tenth and seventh centuries B.C., Aryan religious life was increasingly dominated by the fire sacrifice. A clear indication of this transformation is the increased importance given to *agni* (fire), the recipient of gifts offered to gods and its identification with them. 'In you, O son of strength, are all gods', declares the *Rig-Veda*.²⁴ Gradually, Agni, as the unifying physical power in the sacrifice became supreme. Vedic hymns contain identities such as 'You, O Agni, are Indra'.²⁵ The earlier tendency to unify the functions and powers of many gods in one God is now replaced by the unification of all things, including the gods, in the sacrifice.

This search for unification drew the Aryans still deeper into the elements of sacrificial performance. One such element was the recitation of the *mantras* or the singing of the hymns. First sound and then speech (*vac*) was considered to be the fundamental element of the sacrifice. Thus, in the course of time, speech (*vac*) was deified and raised to the level of a supreme ruler or principle in the universe. Speech (*vac*), therefore, from being a mere form of address became the hidden truth, the source of knowledge. 'The sacrifice is thus no longer a ceremony to the gods nor even a symbolic representation of reality. It is reality'.²⁶

The process of creation itself was thought to be a sacrifice. The creation hymn in the *Rig-Veda* lent itself well to this mode of interpretation. In it, the poet visualized creation as a sacrificial act. The Primal-Being, called *Purusha* (person)²⁷ in an act of self-immolation produced the manifold world. God and the world were said to be one and the 'One' was a Primordial Giant-Man, the victim and prototype of all sacrifice.²⁸

A thousand heads hath Purusa, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet,
On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.
This Purusa is all that yet hath been and all that is to be;
The Lord of Immortality which waxes greater still by food.
So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is Purusa
All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourth eternal life in
heaven.
With three-fourths Purusa went up: one-fourth of him again was
here.

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Thence he strode out to every side over what eats not and what eats. *RV.* 10.90.(1-4)²⁹

God both *is* the universe and transcends it, since the finite world accounts only for one quarter of his being, the remaining three quarters of *Purusha* constitute immortality and are unaffected by cosmic sacrifice. Such a magical interpretation of the universe started in the *Purusha-sukta* is continued in the *Atharva-Veda*.

As sacrifice took the central place in religion, the gods started losing their importance, their divine characters tended to shift to the priests, who so far were only their ministers. Religion no longer consisted in the realization of one's dependence on higher powers, but in the realization of the dependence of the higher powers on an 'absolute power', the sacrifice, which the worshipper now had at his command. Earlier, the sacrifice brought results by the favour of the gods, now the sacrifice as absolute power compels the gods to accede to the desires of the sacrificer. Nay, the gods themselves must sacrifice to obtain their wishes. Sacrifice, like *Rita*, became a super-power, able to shape the world of gods and men, a *fatum* that directed all things in heaven and on earth. The priest was the brain behind this *fatum*.

Further, the tendency of the Vedic gods to merge into one another and to interchange their attributes, combined with the theistic tendency of the worshipper to treat one God as if he were the Supreme God, made the gods appear merely as so many forms and names of the All-God, the All-Power, which became the Absolute. It was called *brahman*. The older meanings of *brahman* as the Vedic *mantras* or as the power of the sacrifice, were replaced by a more comprehensive understanding of *brahman* as the ultimate or absolute reality of the universe.

Such a conclusion reveals that behind the screen of formalism and ceremonialism there was at work a twofold process throughout the *Brahmanas*: a process of reflective and intellectual development from which sprang the *Upanishads*, and a process which was more emotional and popular, a theistic tendency in devout souls and which expressed itself mainly in poetry, mythology and legends, of which some accounts are found at a later date in certain sections of the *Mahabharata*.

Therefore, in the *Brahmana*-literatures, if there was a trend towards pantheism, there was also a trend towards a theistic transcendental

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God. Apparently, even at this early period, the name of Vishnu had begun to be associated with theistic devotion. The legendary account given in the *Brahmanas* in the form of a story of the performance of a great sacrifice by the gods and of the way in which, in connection with it, Vishnu obtained pre-eminence among them all, reminds us of the three mighty steps of the *Rig-Veda*³⁰ with which he traversed the earth, the atmosphere and the highest heaven. In this third region, in the highest realm of light, 'where even birds dare not fly', he dwells inscrutable and transcendent.

The Upanishads

In the Rig-Vedic period, Hinduism centred round the gods. Hymns and praises were addressed to gods. The Vedic man realized his dependence on God; he prayed to Him and offered sacrifices. He was not unselfish in his motives. He wanted power, wealth, riches, happiness and finally the joys of heaven. His mental direction was God-ward. His view of life was coloured by this outlook.

But, in the Upanishadic period, a volte-face takes place in the mental outlook. The mind is centred on Self (*atman*), the transcendental *brahman* becomes the Supreme Self (*paramatman*). The gods become subsidiary. It is interesting to note that at this period, in Buddhist art and literature, we find that the gods hold the umbrella or shower flowers on the heads of great men. It is no more a transcendent God but an immanent God, who becomes the subject of enquiry and it is no more sacrifices to gods but human ethics which become the subject of disputations.

In the *Rig-Veda*, the sages asked, 'Who is the God to whom we shall offer sacrifice?' (*RV*, X. 121). In the *Upanishads*, the question is 'My Lord, if this whole earth, full of wealth, belonged to me, tell me, should I be immortal by it?' (*BU*. II. 4). The great questions: 'How did the Universe originate?', 'How to transcend death?', 'What is Brahman?', take on an importance which overrules that of sacrifice. Knowledge is desired for knowledge's sake. The philosopher takes precedence over the offerer.

In the *Rig-Veda*, the Hindu realized his littleness before the Almighty God and his dependence on Him. So his aim was to please his God, who of course being all-powerful, would give him whatever he wanted. In the *Upanishads*, he gradually became conscious within himself of that reality, light, immortality and power, for which he has been looking up to and praying to his God. This discovery made

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him turn his mind towards himself and search for reality, happiness and immortality within his own self. The search was not in vain. It led him to the discovery of two great doctrines of Hinduism: retribution and transmigration.³¹ Once he realized the truth that his soul (*atman*) is immortal like the Spirit (*atman*) of God, he began to identify the individual soul (*jivatman*) with the Universal Spirit (*paramatman*), and then asked himself, 'If my soul (*atman*) is immortal, then after death it must pass on from life to life whether that life be a life in this world or in the eternity without births, sufferings and deaths.'

Now what is it that would determine this passage? Since nothing is so intimately connected with the life of man, as his own free actions (*karma*), these actions, and only these determine his future life or births.

Therefore, his actions (*karma*) of the present life determine his future life and existence. If his actions are good, he will be born again in a higher caste or higher state, till finally he is purified and is united with God and is born no more. But if his actions are bad, he takes on a lower form of existence, an animal or some other creature depending on how grave his bad actions are. As a corollary, it follows that man is the master of his own fate. Salvation is in his own hands. He cannot change the cycle of births and rebirths unless he changes his actions (*karma*). As the doctrine of transmigration and retribution gained hold over the Hindu mind, his concept of God underwent a great change. Monism took the lead. Yet, Upanishadic literatures reveal a twofold trend: one towards monism and another towards a clear-cut theism.

On the monistic side, *brahman* casts off more and more its sacerdotal trappings and tends to emerge in its metaphysical purity. One of the reasons for this is the theory of *karma* and transmigration. This new theory modified the religious outlook of the people and posed a problem for which the official religion had no answer, namely, release from transmigration and *karma*. This became the great obsession of the more reflective thinkers.

On the theistic side, there existed already a conception of an absolute plane transcending the sphere of change, where *brahman* reposed as the Absolute, in its absolute indetermination of mere Being identical with mere Awareness. Here again it was asked: How could the individual soul (*atman*) ascend to this plane? The soul was supposed to be irretrievably enmeshed in the web of *karma*. The cry for deliverance arose from the enmeshed souls.

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Answers came from the Rishis. Some said: 'The self has not to ascend to the plane of Brahma. Brahma, whole and undivided is in the *atman* (self).' But others with monistic tendencies went further and said: '*brahman* is *atman*.'

It has been hammered into the heads of Vedic students that the great achievement of the *Upanishads* is the so-called *brahman-atman* synthesis—the identification of the individual soul (*atman*) with the ground of the universe (*brahman*). This is an oversimplification. *Atman* does not necessarily mean 'individual soul'. *Atman*, used generally as a reflexive pronoun, was given a more specific meaning as the essential part of man, his basic reality. It meant the inner self, the principle or entity that gave man his essential nature and was distinguished from the gross physical body. It could also mean the 'Cosmic Soul'—soul or the ground of all. Thus, it is merely another word for *brahman*. To identify the two in this sense is a pure and simple tautology.³² They identify the deepest level of the subjective 'I' with the ground of the objective universe: either can be referred to as *brahman* or *atman*. Ideas such as these had already found expression in the *Atharva-Veda* and the *Brahmanas*. The *Upanishads* merely took up the train of thought.

At the popular level, however, the doctrine of release taught by the *Upanishads* hardly influenced the religion of the ordinary priest and the householder. They faithfully clung to the gods, who rewarded their services with protection and material prosperity. Hence, we notice that after the *Upanishads* a new codification of the rules of religious conduct arose, the so-called *sutras*. The *Srauta-sutras* dealt with the great sacrifices, the *Grihya-sutras* with the minor sacrifices and the *Dharma-sutras* with social and political law and customs. All the gods are acknowledged and even a few new deities appeared on the stage.

The trend towards theism is further seen in the consideration of *brahman-atman* not only as the imperishable, the All, but also as the Lord and King of all, the 'Inner Controller', who indwells the cosmos, yet is other than it.

The shift towards theism becomes more marked when the word *deva* 'God' is used not in the sense of a god but of God, the omnipotent, omniscient ruler of the universe. The culmination of this tendency is seen in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* where Rudra-Siva is described as the Supreme Lord (1.10), a personal God, who transcends both the finite and the infinite.³³

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The beginning, the efficient cause of combinations,
He is to be seen as beyond the three times (*kala*), without
parts (*a-kala*) too !
Worship Him as the manifold, the origin of all being,
The adorable God who abides in one's own thoughts, the
primeval.
Higher and other than the world-tree, time, and forms
Is He from whom this expanse proceeds.
The bringer of right (*dharma*), the remover of evil (*papa*),
the lord of prosperity—
Know Him as in one's own self (*atma-sth*), as the immortal
above of all.
Him who is the supreme Mighty Lord (*mahesvara*) of lords,
The supreme Divinity of divinities,
The supreme Ruler of rulers, paramount,
Him let us know as the adorable God, the Lord (is) of the world
SU. VI. 5-1

In the opinion of Dr Zaehner, 'The achievement of the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* is that it welds together the teachings of earlier *Upanishads*, Samkhya theory and yoga practice, as well as the creation hymns of *Rig-Veda* into a theistic framework.'³⁴ Its God, Rudra-Siva, called also the great Lord Mahesvara, dwells in the human heart. Therefore, immanent: 'Who-so knows him with heart and mind as dwelling in the heart, becomes immortal' (IV. 20).

He is also transcendent, because he is the supreme *Purusha* among the many *purushas* and the Lord of *purushas* (souls) and *prakriti* (nature). 'Just as the Great God transcends both the finite and infinite, *prakriti* and *purusha*, *maya* and *brahman*, so is he more intimate to the soul of man than the soul of itself: transcending the infinite he yet indwells the soul.' All this is later to be formalized in the theology of *Saiva Siddhanta* in Tamil-speaking lands in the thirteenth century A.D.³⁵ A further contention of Dr Zaehner is that in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, the Absolute is for the first time identified with a personal God, Rudra-Siva. Though Siva indwells the soul, he is not identical with it; he is the *antaratman*, ever seated in the heart of creatures (3. P3) but since he is God, worship is due to him (2. 17) and it is legitimate to invoke his protection and his grace (*prasada*). The immanent God is thus to be known by yoga, and the transcendent God to be worshipped with loving devotion (*bhakti*).³⁶

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As the identification of the Absolute with a particular deity took root in the minds of the people, legends and mythological stories grew around that deity and the personality of that God became fixed as is seen in the literatures of the Epic and Puranic period.

THE EPICS AND THE PURANAS

The Epics and the *Puranas* are not religious books by themselves. But in these books religion takes a new orientation in belief, cult, and the way of salvation. Polytheism at last is overcome, although perhaps not completely, since we see it functioning in a subordinate aspect in this new theism.

According to Sir R.G. Bhandarkar, the mainstream of theism of this period is to be found in the *Bhagavata* or *Pancharatra* system, which did not owe its origin to the *Vedas* or *Upanishads*. This, according to the Narayaniya section of the *Mahabharata*, is 'an independent religion possessed by *satvatas* and using Vasudeva as the characteristic name of the supreme deity'. Bhandarkar is also of the opinion that this religion is of Kshatriya origin.³⁷

The two great gods of this period, Vishnu or Siva are considered by their respective worshippers as being one with the Absolute Brahma of the *Upanishads*. This identification with either Vishnu or Siva shows clearly that the Absolute is now a personal Supreme God. Brahma gave to Vishnu and Siva what they needed: absoluteness and supremacy; Siva and Vishnu on the other hand gave to Brahma what it lacked, namely, personality. God, therefore is now conceived as a spiritual Being, endowed with attributes, able to enter into relations of fellowship with souls. The personal God naturally invites personal intercourse with Him. It will henceforth be said that loving service of God (*bhakti*) is the means to lead us back to the divine plane from which our sinful *karma* keeps us estranged.

If, in the Upanishadic period, it was intellectualism that tried to deprive theism of its popularity and spread and convert it to monism, during the Epic and Puranic period it was asceticism (*tapas*) which threatened to root out theism from existence.

Among the Indo-Aryans, the word for austerities is *tapas*. In the Vedic period, it is conceived as a mighty power. The creator underwent *tapas* before he created the world. Truth and right are born of *tapas*. In the great hymn of Creation in the *Rig-Veda*, the one Reality is born from *tapas*. So the Vedic people thought that they themselves would obtain or acquire mighty powers by practising *tapas*. The pur-

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pose they had in view while practising *tapas* was the winning of bliss or some invincible power. They thought they would conquer the world through *tapas*.

When the doctrine of transmigration and *karma* broke in upon the old life and old thought, reflective men looked eagerly for means of release from births and rebirths. They no longer desired wealth, position, success, pleasure. Human life and earthly things were not only empty and worthless, but evil powers. The whole world of phenomena was inherently antagonistic to the spiritual life. They, therefore, decided to divest themselves of every element of the common life of man. They renounced the worship of the gods, the ways of their ancestors, caste, home, the use of fire, marriage, family, money, amusements, works of every kind and lived a wandering life, getting their food by begging. Their aim was to lay aside everything that belonged to the sphere of *karma*. Thus, the word *sannyasa*, which may be translated as renunciation, world-surrender, was used to designate their practice as a whole. They were called *sannyasis*, renouncers. Since they wandered about and begged their bread, they were called *parivrajakas* (wanderers), *bhikshus* (beggars).

Many of these monks, in the anxiety to win release, adopted in addition to all their renunciation the old form of self-mortification, *tapas*, in the belief that by these potent self-inflicted tortures, they would the sooner conquer the sensual tendencies of the body and the dense ignorance of the soul, which were the chief hindrances to true knowledge and final release. It is perhaps most curious to note that *tapas*, which was originally used in order to secure material blessings (in the *Rig-Veda*), should now be used to eliminate the desire for those very blessings.

Amongst these men, there also gradually evolved a series of physical and intellectual exercises, meant to train the body and the mind. Bodily postures, breathing exercises and intellectual concentration began to be practised, in order to bring both body and mind under the yoke. It was called *yoga*.

The concentration of the whole intellectual faculty on a single point to the exclusion of all phenomena, the merging of one's consciousness of plurality in an ecstatic vision of unity, was conceived to be the best way of approaching God. As the Hindu thinker, who in the Vedic times had conceived God as transcendent, began to conceive Him only as immanent, his religion of faith became a religion of the intellect. His enquiry into the immanent God gradually led him to a homo-

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centric Hinduism. Extreme intellectualism and extreme asceticism estranged the people. The result was dissatisfaction. Although it produced great philosophers, it did not satisfy the common folk. Hinduism needed another movement to save it from complete destruction. The *Bhagavad-Gita* performed that task in an extraordinary way. It united all the living trends in Hinduism into a theism. Each of these developments shows us a steady progression towards theism. The identification of *brahman* with Vishnu distinctly suggests that the Absolute is a personal God and this concept becomes more pronounced when Krishna becomes the incarnation of Vishnu.

The *Gita* is part of the gigantic work of 100,000 *slokas*, called the *Mahabharata*, which is three and half times as big as the entire Bible. However, only a few verses in the sixth Book are known to the world as the *Gita*. It played a significant role not only in India's strictly religious and philosophical schools but also in its practical life as well. It became the inspiring force of the great leaders during the national struggle for freedom. It was Gandhi's companion during the years of his campaign and during the term of his prison life. He says that the book is 'unrivalled for its spiritual merits'.

Although it is part of the epic poem of the *Mahabharata*, yet it is generally agreed among scholars that the *Gita* is of a later origin than the bulk of the *Mahabharata*. Justice Telang believed that it belonged to the fourth century B.C. and Sir S.G. Bhandarkar argued in favour of the same date, but most modern scholars recognize that in its present form, it can scarcely be dated earlier than the first or second century B.C. In any case, since it is now a part of the *Mahabharata* epic, let us continue with the epics and the *Puranas*.

The worship of Siva certainly did make unlimited progress among the Tamil speaking people of the south. Hymns, devotions, prayers, which enriched Tamil literature, attracted the devotees of Siva to a deeply devotional movement, whose climax could be seen in the works of Sambandhar and Manika Vasagar. Thus, the great Bhakti movement started, which was later to sweep the whole of India.

The theology of Saiva Siddhanta, as systematized by Maykandar in his *Sivajnanabodham*, asserts the concept of a transcendent God. God, according to this system, is love (*SB. 1.47*) and his every action springs from his loving care of his creatures. All existence is divided into *pati*, *pasu* and *pasa*. *Pati*, meaning Lord refers to God; *pasu*, meaning cattle refers to souls; and *pasa* meaning fetters refers to the world, which binds the souls. God alone, who is transcendent, is

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wholly independent of the world and souls, which are completely dependent on Him for their existence and for their actions. Never could any one say the soul is God or God is the soul. Hence, 'The Saiva Siddhanta presents perhaps the highest form of theism that India was ever to develop, for Siva, even as a mythological figure, gives an overwhelming impression of 'otherness' and transcendence which the much milder and more superficially attractive figure of Vishnu rarely does. Vishnu is very much nearer to man and becomes incarnate as man.'³⁸

The incarnation theory played a significant role in raising Vishnu to the position of a theistic God. The greatest of his incarnations is the Krishna-incarnation (Krishna-*avatar*). Just as Saiva Siddhanta was built on the foundations of *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, so Vaishnavism or the cult of Vishnu and subsequent Hinduism were built on the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Historically, it is the expression of the earliest attempt made in India to give to Hinduism a theistic faith and theology. In order to achieve this ideal, the author of the poem takes the three elements already existing in Hinduism and with the dexterity of genius combines them and gives to the people a religion that would satisfy all the needs of man. The three elements are: (i) The 'One' of the *Rig-Veda*, (ii) the *Brahman-Atman* concept of God, (iii) Krishna, a partial incarnation of Vishnu. The composer of the *Gita* takes Vishnu, one of the great gods of Hinduism, and declares him to be the fullest incarnation of Brahma, and receives the title Bhagavan, 'Blessed Lord'. Hence, the name of the poem, *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Lord's Song. In short, one without a second = Vishnu = Krishna (Incarnate God). However, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, while evolving a theism, has taken great care to bring the religion within the reach of all. The release from transmigration, which the *Upanishads* taught the cultured Hindus to aim at, was offered only to the three highest castes because these holy texts might not be uttered in the hearing of any but the twice-born (the three high castes). Buddhism and Jainism, on the other hand, offered release even to the outcastes and foreigners, but still the monks had a special predilection. The *Gita* went further, in the sense that it offered release not only to all Hindus without any distinction of caste, but was also made available even to the layman and his wife, who maintained their household duties and took part in the business of the world.

• It proposed three distinct ways in which release might be won. The first was the traditional way taught by the *Upanishads* and Samkhya philosophy, the way of knowledge (*jnana-marga*). The second was the

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way of works (*karma-marga*), which included sacrifices, all the duties of caste, conditioned by the family and society. And the third was the *bhakti-marga*, the path of devotion, a new way offered by the *Gita*. It is this wholehearted devotion to Krishna which brought release from transmigration as effectively as philosophical knowledge or the selfless performance of ordained duties ! This method of devotion was the connecting link between the ancient cult of the Vaishnava sect and the new teaching of the *Gita*. *Bhakti* became the great spiritual end of emancipation of the soul from all the bonds of the phenomenal universe.

More and more scholars agree that the truly central theme of the *Gita* is *bhakti*. The author is entirely imbued with its spirit, and having a strong sense of tradition, he brings the tenets of other schools into line with the theme of devotion to a personal God.³⁹ Thus, we see that the central idea of the *Gita* runs as follows: Bhagavan, the highest God, comprises all the perfections of the Upanishadic *brahman-atman*. He is the origin of all beings; He demands supreme devotion and the dedication of all the actions of man; He answers such devotion by liberating man from rebirths and leads him to the highest goal. The way of knowledge is commended but subordinated to devotion to the personal God.

Vedic religion is thus subsumed under the larger, comprehensive world picture in which Bhagavan sets a higher, transcendent destiny before man, namely, freedom from the entanglement of the world and unity with the highest God.

Asceticism (*tapas*), now turned into *yoga*, which was individualistic and centred on the emancipation of man from the limitations of the phenomenal world, acquires a God-centred orientation: 'Holding all these (senses, etc.), in check, let him sit, controlled, intent on Me.'

The theology of the *Gita* is but a continuation of the Saiva Siddhantic theology. God is beyond space and time and consequently, 'the soul participates in God's mode of existence without for that reason being identical with him'.⁴⁰

The last words of the *Gita* represent a decisive turning-point in the history of Hinduism; and it is Krishna's 'most secret doctrine of all' and his 'ultimate word'. 'Hear again the most secret (doctrine) of all, my ultimate word. Because I greatly desire thee, therefore shall I tell thee thy salvation. Think on me, worship me, sacrifice to me, pay me homage, so shalt thou come to me. I promise thee truly, for I love thee well. Give up all the things of dharma, turn to me only as thy

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refuge. I will deliver thee from all evil. Have no care' (18, 64-66).

The full significance of this aspect of the *Gita* was first brought into relief by Ramanuja, the great theist philosopher of the eleventh century.⁴¹ For Ramanuja, as for the Saiva Siddhanta, the phenomenal world is real and *maya* is God's mode of operation in it; God is distinct from the soul and from the phenomenal world. God is the Supreme soul, but at the same time he is in a different category and wholly other than all that is not himself. Moreover, God is a person, and as a person, he is possessed of all good qualities to a superlative degree.

Ramanuja, like Sankaracharya, called himself a Vedantin but his differences from Sankara are radical, and he is the first of the many Vaishnavite philosophers of whom Madhva, Vallabha, Nimbarka, and the followers of Chaitanya are the most important. They all rejected Sankara's pure monism as being destructive of religion. Madhva, who lived in the thirteenth century, went much further than Ramanuja and was not afraid to describe himself as a dualist (*dvaita*).

Again, it was in Tamil Nadu that the cult of Krishna first came into prominence. During the eighth century A.D., or even earlier, a great spiritual renewal was initiated by the 'Alvars', men who have intuitive knowledge of God. These men came from a population which remained unaffected by the pantheism of the *Upanishads*. So intensely personal is their attitude to God and so deeply emotional is their worship of him that for the first time since the early Vedic age, Namalvar, one of the 'Alvars', denied that man's highest goal is liberation, for to him the loveless technique of yoga had no meaning. From the tenth century onwards all that is most vital in Hinduism manifested itself in the form of *bhakti*.

The renewal of Hinduism in the south came just in time to prepare Hinduism for the greatest trial of strength it had ever been called on to face—the coming of Islam.

We find nothing new philosophically or theologically in the different sects of *bhakti* cults which followed the different schools. Whether they were wholehearted theists or combined theism with monistic philosophy, the chief difference now generally appears to depend upon whether they were inspired by the figure of Rama or of Krishna and whether an effort was being made to return to a more spiritual worship and cleaner life. It was this persistence of monotheism which started in the Varuna hymns and struggled on throughout centuries of the history of Hinduism, that inspired Professor Fallon to write:

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But an intimate acquaintance with Hindu philosophical and religious literature as well as with the living devotion of the Hindu masses will soon reveal that, transcending the monism of many a philosophical system and underlying the very idolatry of popular devotion, a deep and lofty idea of God has, all through the history of Hinduism, acted as a corrective against the rationalistic conceptualisations of the darsanikas (philosophers) and the mythological anthropomorphisms of the bhaktas (devotees).⁴²

The majority of Hindus, whether they defended and practised idol-worship with Ramanuja, Manika Vasagar, Tulasi Das, Tukaram and Ramakrishna, or denounced it with Namadev, Kabir, Nanak, Dadu, Ram Mohun Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and Tagore, have had of God a very elevated and pure conception. The one whom they meditated upon as Brahman, whom they realised within themselves as Paramatman, whom they contemplated and invoked as Bhagavan, may not have revealed Himself to them in the full and spotless light.... Yet their quest was for the *One True God*, and *they would not have sought Him if they had not already in some way found Him*.⁴³

On the whole, the theological philosophy of the Upanishadic period has controlled consciously or unconsciously the process of theology in India. What was latent in the institutions of these seers comes to full self-consciousness in the systems of theologians and philosophers.

Those who do not consider the theism of the *Rig-Veda* as Indian because of its many semitic characteristics, are ready to consider the theism of the *Upanishads* as Indian because, according to them, one finds in them 'an ineradicable instinct for pantheism'⁴⁴ on the part of the Indian people.

We do not know how far this is true. But the fact is that the title of pantheism so often applied to this whole body of speculation is a misnomer. The thesis the Upanishads tries to establish is that the *atman* is the only valuable thing and we must not cease from mental and moral toil until we reach it—hard as it is to reach. But according to pantheism one can never get away from God, because in pantheism, God is all and all is God.⁴⁵

It is also true that in the *Upanishads* there is nothing like a successive advance towards the complete disclosure of monotheism. It is only at a late period that the religion of devotion becomes fully articulate

ITS EVOLUTION IN THE HINDU TRADITION

as a theology. But it will be seen that there certainly has been a continual struggle and conflict between the natural instinct of the people for theism and a certain tendency, peculiar perhaps to the Aryans, towards intellectualism and abstraction. Even granting this peculiar tendency, we must note that the characteristics of the insights of the seers are mystic and the language of the mystics is not the language of ordinary men. Some of the writings of the theistic Eckhart are not far removed from the Upanishadic writings.

Our description of the evolution of monotheism, though too brief to come to any definite conclusion, yet gives us an idea of the trend in the sacred literatures and this leaves us in doubt about the established opinion that Hinduism is monistic and pantheistic. Further, our reflections on the religious experiences of the Indian people confirm the thesis that there has been a consistent and persistent striving of the people for a monotheistic religion.

The culmination of this struggle and quest for monotheism, even after the *Bhakti* cult had established itself all over India, reached its climax in a separate monotheistic religion, Sikhism.

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30. *Rig-Veda*, I. 155.5.
31. It is difficult to give an exact translation of *karma* and *samsara*. For our purpose it is enough to translate *karma* as deeds and *samsara* as rebirths.
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CHAPTER V

Sikh Monotheism

The One God is the Father of all
We are His children.

Adi Granth

INFLUENCE OF ISLAM

During the Muslim rule, religious concepts in India underwent a change. Islam is a supremely simple religion, and its uncompromising monotheism offered an attractive alternative to the complexities of the prevailing Hinduism, with all its rites, ritual, caste system, and ceremonies.

There were two sides to the influence of Islam on Hinduism, a negative side and a positive side. On the negative side was the destruction of everything Hinduism had stood for: rituals, idols, gods and goddesses, caste system, etc. On the positive side were the efforts of Kabir and Nanak to bridge the gulf between the two religions.

Kabir was a Muslim by adoption, and though he early abandoned the Muslim faith, he retained the strict monotheism of Islam. In spirit, he was far more Hindu than Muslim, and this is presumably what led him to reject the rigid and sometimes fierce dogmatism of Islam. However, efforts to create a bridge between the two religions failed. But the great victory and the crown of success in bringing about a lasting and permanent bridge between Hinduism and Islam goes to Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Like Kabir, Nanak was a strict monotheist.

The whole tenor of Nanak's thought about God is opposed to the monistic view. To Nanak, God is more than an impersonal Absolute. He is a person, full of love and mercy. Dr Trilochan Singh writes, 'The oneness of God in Guru Nanak and Sikhism is not a speculative idea inferred from the idea of His perfection but the ineffable oneness of God is self-evident from His presence revealed in experience. He is

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one in his unmanifest Transcendent state. He is one in His manifest and Immanent condition.²¹

We have said that in the history of religions the concept of monotheism appeared first in concrete instances. Judaism, Islam and Zoroastrianism are examples of that belief in one God, which in practice opposed all that was contrary to the worship of only one God. Sikhism was one such religion in India. Like Mohammad, like Zoroaster and like the prophets of the Old Testament, Guru Nanak first condemned the worship of many gods as something meaningless.

THE MOOL MANTRA

The *mool mantra*, that epitomized formula of the Sikh creed, enunciates that the God of Guru Nanak is the One God whose name is truth, and who is the creator without fear and without hate; the eternal whose spirit pervades the universe; the ungenerated *purakh* self-existent to whose worship the grace of the Guru leads.

God is described here as One, *Ik Omkar*. There is but One God. Innumerable passages in the *Granth Sahib* amply prove this. But what does unity mean? Does it mean a unity in the sense of monism, that is, the unification of all realities, (whether finite or infinite; whether created or uncreated) into the One Reality called God? Or does it mean the unification of all gods and goddesses into One God, as the Greeks did in ancient times? Or does it mean the one underlying principle or source from which all multiplicities arise as the Greek philosophers thought? Or does it mean the one Good as opposed to all evil in the world as Zoroaster's God came to represent? Or does it mean the Unique One, the Transcendental One?

The God of Guru Nanak cannot be the God of monism, because for Guru Nanak and the Sikhs, the world is not an illusion but real.

Sache tere khand Sache Brahamand

Sache tere loh sache akar. AG. 463

'Real are Thy realms and real Thy Universe, Real are thy words and real the created forms.'

Professor Harbans Singh in his book, *Guru Nanak and Origins of Sikh Faith*² points out that, 'One of the conspicuous marks of Guru Nanak's teachings was its spirit of affirmation. It took the world as real and embraced man's life in its various aspects.' The God of *Guru Granth* cannot be the Absolute of the monists, because the entire *Guru*

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Granth Sahib is a litany of hymns addressed to someone living and personal. The One Guru Nanak speaks of is a transcendental One. But the transcendence is not in the sense of deism, whose deity has no connection whatsoever with the world. For Guru Nanak, He is also immanent, that is, not in the sense of pantheism but in a monotheistic sense. He is transcendent, since He is above the world as the highest being and as the ultimate cause, unique in every sense of the word. He is also immanent, since He is 'present in' the world. This 'present in' is certainly not the same as 'identical with' the world. In the *Granth Sahib*, the transcendence of God is greatly emphasized.

Not by thought alone
Can he be known
Though one think
A hundred thousand times;
Not in a solemn silence
Nor in deep meditation
Though fasting yields an abundance of virtue
It cannot appease the hunger for truth
No by none of these,
Nor by a hundred thousand other devices,
Can God be reached. *AG. 663. Jap. 2*

The hymns extolling His transcendence are comparably more in number than those which stress His immanence.

Transcendence should be conceived not as something, 'Up above' or beyond space; it is rather an essentially absolute independence, a self-sufficiency. In like manner, immanence is not a mixing of Divine Being with created realities, but a mode of spiritual presence, absolutely irreducible to that of corporeal presence and by that very fact, infinitely more intimate, enveloping and capable of inhering in everything. Guru Nanak says:

The One is Revealed
The One is Hidden
The One is behind the Dark Veil. *AG. 1215*

This states that God is so transcendent that revelation is needed to know Him—'The One is revealed'. He is so immanent that He cannot be seen—'The One is Hidden'. Yet, since He is the ground of all, He is

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said to be 'The one (who) is behind the Dark Veil'.

With regard to the attributes of God which are common to most of the monotheistic systems such as infinity, simplicity, immutability, eternity, goodness, omniscience and omnipotence, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is abundantly profuse in expressions. What is important to us is the overwhelming emphasis in Sikhism on its personal God. We could go as far back as the *Rig-Veda* to say that the concept of a personal God was there in India and that the *Bhakti* cults in Hindu tradition were nothing but the worship of a personal God. But it goes to the credit of only Sikhism to have turned this belief into an essential element of religion.

PERSONAL GOD OF SIKHISM

The word *purakh* may not mean 'a person' in the modern sense, nor could we translate it as the *purusha* of Indian philosophy, since Guru Nanak himself, as if to deny the *purusha* concept of Hinduism to *purakh*, has placed the word *qudrat* in opposition to *purakh* instead of the usual counterpart, *prakriti* of Indian philosophy. Dr Sher Singh in his *Philosophy of Sikhism*, affirming that the God of Sikhism is a personal God, quotes Macauliffe to support this statement: 'a religion without a personal God has not yet been found to be a living and enduring force.'³ Further, he points out that 'the essence of personality lies in responsiveness to other persons. How can a lifeless and impersonal God behave like a sympathetic father or mother. God is not only *Sat* but also *purakh*. 'Nanak's God', writes Khushwant Singh, in his book, *Hymns of Guru Nanak*, 'despite his incomprehensibility, is a good, warm and friendly God. He is the father (*pita*), lover (*pritam*) and master-husband (*Khasam-sahib*). Therefore, the God of Sikhism is a personal God, otherwise the *pita*, *pritam* and *khasam-sahib* will have no meaning.'⁴

The one God is the father of all;
We are his children. AG. 187

Guru Nanak speaks of surrender, love, devotion and worship to God. How is this possible, if He is not a person? The very words 'Guru Nanak uses after *purakh*, namely *nirbhau* and *nirvair* are words which could not be mentioned with relation to an impersonal Absolute. Love and hatred, fear and fearlessness are the attributes of a personal living being.

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Again, Guru Nanak's concept of Creator-God is different from the Hindu concept. He is *karta purakh*. For Guru Nanak, God alone is eternal; He alone is self-existent. All others were created by Him. •

By him are all forms created *Jap. 2*

God is the sole cause, the cause of causes, there is no other cause outside Him and hence He is named *karan-karan*. Nanak says that God is the creator of heaven and earth. Even the highest Gods of Hinduism, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are all created by Him. Guru Nanak, by bringing in *hukum* in the concept of creation, consistently and rightly denies any kind of material cause. The creation takes place through His will:

Hukami howan Akar Jap. 2

How speak of Him who with one Word did the whole
Universe create *AG. 1003; Jap. 16*

What He wills he ordains *Jap. 27*

Although the *hukum* or *sabad* of God is mentioned in the Quranic or Biblical sense, yet some like Dr Sher Singh think that Guru Nanak's idea of creation is monistic. This is misleading. A correct understanding of the concept of creation, gives a better clue than Hindu philosophy to the understanding of Guru Nanak's concept. The term creation expresses the way in which the world and everything pertaining to the world have their origin, ground and final goal in God. It implies a comprehensive action of God on the world and a total relationship of the world to God. The concept transcends all categories of thought and the metaphysical system like pantheism, emanationism and dualism cannot be reconciled with the doctrine of creation, because, on the positive side, it is the action of a personal God and the 'person' is the most characteristic of his creations, and on the negative side it is not one of causality. The concept of authorship paves the way for a better understanding of creation.

Creation embraces the whole of reality of the world; not just its beginning but its whole existence including its consummation; not just its static being, but its dynamism and activity. We must, therefore, insist that creation is not a 'cause' within the category of causes, but the living transcendent ground of the world and its movement. Creation means that everything without exception is God's action

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and God's beneficent action towards man. To believe in creation is to see someone behind all things—to see the world as 'gift'.

- The goal of creation can only be man, as person and as community; only man can receive love as love. Creation is considered as the free act of God to man. It means that the whole of reality comes to him as a *sabad* (word) of God, summoning and inviting him to an equally total response in which man responds to the *sabad* with the fullness of his own being and of his word.

Nirankar Akar hoe, ekonkar apar sadaya

Ekonkaron sabad dhuni, omkar akar banaya. Var. 26.2

The Guru uses words like *kartar*, *siranda*, *usaranwala*, *khaliq*, and *bharnhar*, which are all personal names, as if to mean that creation is the action of a personal God.

CHRISTIANITY AND SIKHISM

Looked at in the light of Judaeo-Christian monotheism, Sikhism can be called a monotheistic religion only when its unique transcendental and immanent God is also conceived as a person, separate from the created universe. That the God of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is a personal God is the unanimous affirmation of the majority of Sikh theologians and philosophers. But we cannot say the same as regards the reality of God being separate from the reality of the word. There are still some interpreters of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, who interpret the scriptures in a monistic sense. If this is the case, then Sikhism cannot be called 'monotheism' in the Judaeo-Christian sense, as the distinction between creatures and the Creator is fundamental to the Judaeo-Christian meaning of monotheism.

However, Sikhism and Christianity agree in the condemnation of a plurality of gods and in the insistence on the worship of only one God. In this respect, Guru Nanak's hymns seem like an echo across the centuries of the monotheistic preaching of Jesus. We know that there is only one God, the Father, who is the 'Creator of all things' (I Cor. 8.6) in whom 'we live and move and are' (Acts 17.1-28), etc.

The Golden Temple (Harmandir) at Amritsar reminds one of the temple of the Jews at Jerusalem dedicated to the only one God. They allowed no other temple to be built anywhere in the world. Only synagogues, places for assembly and study were allowed. And the

only requirement for a synagogue was a chest to contain the sacred scrolls, exactly similar to our Gurdwaras where the only equipment one finds is the throne for the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Comparing the nature of God in Christianity and Sikhism, it appears that the description of God as love and as a friend has its similarities in both religions.

O my love I have no one but Thee
Without Thee, I am nought and by loving Thee I am at peace
O my mind love thy Lord
Sacrifice, am I unto thee my stainless Friend.
Come, come, O friend into me.

These are but a few of the quotations from the *Adi Granth* to compare with, 'Love the Lord, thy God', 'God is love', 'Love is the fulfilment of the law', etc., of the Bible.

This resemblance as regards God's love is still more striking when one notices that it is a 'pardoning love' in both religions. Both of them affirm that 'whatever a man sows, that he will reap' (Gal. 8.7). Beyond this essential part of the theory of retribution (*karma*), the two teachers differ, Nanak accepting the theory of rebirth without questioning it and Jesus rejecting it implicitly or even perhaps explicitly in rare passages. The theory of retribution is prone to incite man to despair. For who shall escape the sway of his own actions? Who, indeed, unless the very law of retribution can be transcended by the forgiving power of the merciful God?

That God is merciful,⁶ that he is our friend,⁷ that He Himself pardons,⁸ is the good news preached by Guru Nanak after Jesus. Sins can be washed away, not by ritual baths but by a sincere love for God.

When the True Guru is merciful, man shall know no sorrow.⁹
He who bears and obeys and loves God in his heart shall wash off (his impurity) in this place of pilgrimage that is within him.¹⁰
By attaching himself to God's Name he is saved.¹¹

To this similarity, we must add the similarity that exists in both religions as regards *nam* and *sabad*. For the Semitic peoples, an unnamed thing was a non-existent thing. Names were considered to identify and describe the very being and function of their bearers. In religious matters, knowledge of the name of God was considered the

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most effective way of establishing contact with Him. The divine name was evocative, not only of God's being, but of His relationship with His people. It was held in great esteem. The 'name of the Lord' was loved, praised, and thanked. The divine name was synonymous with God's glory (Is. 42.8). Prophets spoke 'in the name of the Lord'. Christians still begin and end all their services 'in the name of God'. The 'name' was often personified and eventually was referred to God Himself (Is. 30.27).

Nam Japo is Nanak's constant exhortation. 'As the blind use the stick, so do I use the name of the Lord to feel the path that leads to God' (AG. 421). *Nam* is considered as the shrine of God and the sanctuary of divine knowledge.

teerath havan jao teerath nam hai
teerath sabad beechar antar gyan hae. AG. 687

Name is also used for God Himself.

Through the mercy of the true Guru
Nanak has obtained the true Name. *Guru. V. Sri Rag*
Dwell on him day after day,
that thou mergest imperceptibly in *Nam*. *Guru. III. Sri Rag*
We should worship the *nam* believe in the *nam*,
which is ever and ever the same and true. *Guru. I. Sri Rag*

Although in the question of creation, the parallel between Christianity and Sikhism is not clear because of the interpretation given by scholars in the monistic sense, yet the use of the word *sabad* in the creative act,

utpat parlau sabade hovai AG. 117, 1033

shows that the act of creation in Sikhism could only be explained in the Christian sense. *Sabad*, translated as *Logos*, is an intriguing term. *Logos* is central to Christianity. *Sabad* also, I must say, is central to Sikhism. *Logos* signifies Jesus and *Sabad* signifies Guru.

The true Guru is the word, *Siddha Ghost*, 44

Sabad in Sikh theology is the intermediary between Guru and disciple,

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it is the essence of knowledge: *sabad braham gyan*. Similarly, *Logos* in Christian theology is Christ, the only mediator between God and man. He is also the *Braham Gyan*—‘The one who knows me knows the Father.’ These verbal and conceptual parallels in both religions require a deeper study before we can affirm or deny their identities or differences.

Now, coming to the question of God as a ‘person’, Judaism, Islam and Christianity affirm this concept. It is here perhaps that a dividing line is drawn between the semitic and the Hindu concept of monotheism. It is here that Sikhism together with the *Bhaktas* parts ways with Hinduism, and travels with Semitic religions. But when the point of plurality of persons in God is reached, Judaism and Islam slam the door on Christianity. The Koran emphatically denies any possibility of more than one person in God. Islam identifies ‘nature’ with ‘person’. Therefore, One God means one person. Later Judaism also is averse to this concept, and that is due to a misunderstanding of the concept of ‘nature’ and ‘person’. Modern psychology reveals new insights into the truth of person and personality, which was unknown before. Human personality is seen as a centre of relationships through self-consciousness and self-giving. A person is, therefore, someone complete in himself (an incommunicable individual) but also someone constituted by his relations. Persons, as we know them, are social, that is, they enjoy personal relationships. This is theologically significant for Christians since it makes their Trinitarian mystery somewhat understandable.

Sikhism, with its *Guru* concept, *nam*-concept, and *sabad*-concept seems to me to hold the key to further insights into the Trinitarian mystery of this only one Deity. All these require deep studies, in the absence of which I can only affirm that Sikh monotheism is open to an interpretation of Christian monotheism and does not slam its door on it as does Islam.

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CHAPTER VI

The Philosophy of Indian Monotheism

The one God, hidden in all things,
All-pervading, the Inner Soul of all things,
The overseer of deeds, in all things abiding,
The witness, the sole thinker, devoid of qualities
Svet. Up. VI. 11

One Only, without a second

Ch. Up. VI. 2. 2

THE ULTIMATE

Dr Heinrich Zimmer once wrote that the western philosophers had been in agreement for some time that outside Europe philosophy did not exist.¹ Hegel had argued that something was missing in Oriental philosophy. The reason adduced was that the philosophies of India and China lacked 'the ever renewed, fructifying, close contact with the progressive natural sciences—their improving critical methods and their increasingly secular, non-theological, practically anti-religious outlook on man and the world.'²

The reason is neither convincing nor satisfactory to the Oriental. Oriental philosophers question whether western philosophy deserves the name. It leaves out the essential element of philosophy: Ultimate Reality. Knowledge of changing phenomena does not foster a realistic attitude. It lacks substance, a foundation or ground in an unchanging Reality. This knowledge is therefore bound to perish. Nor is the knowledge of changing things conducive to an idealistic outlook. The flux of ephemeral phenomena sets one in the midst of inconsistency and contradictions and mutual refutation. By nature, then, phenomenal forms are delusory, fallacious.

The achievement of Indian philosophy is the discovery of an omnipresent substratum underlying all substance: the ultimate, enduring, supporting source of all being—*brahman*—the real. Added to this is the discovery of an independent imperishable entity, beneath the

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conscious personality and bodily frame of the individual—*atman*—the blissful ground, eternal and imperishable Being, translated by 'soul' or 'self'.

These two, *brahman*, the ultimate ground of all being, and *atman*, the ultimate source of all consciousness, have been identified in a single monistic philosophy. As R.E. Hume has said:

the two great conceptions—*brahman*, reached first realistically, the unitary cosmic ground, with out-reachings towards a cosmo-anthropic ground; and *Atman*, the inner being of the self and the not-self, the great world-spirit—were joined, the former taking over to itself the latter conception and the two being henceforth to a considerable degree synonymous. Here the quest for the real, beautifully expressed in a different connection, by the three verses of *Brih.* 1.3.28:

From the unreal lead me to the real.

From darkness lead me to light.

From death lead me to immortality.

reached a goal.³

We will attempt now to get at the real meaning of this goal. The last word has yet to be said on this identity of *brahman* and *atman*. To misunderstand it is to consider Hinduism wrongly as monistic or pantheistic. A correct understanding, however, leads to *satyasya satyam*, the Reality of Realities, the Infinite God.

THE INFINITE

Descartes began his philosophy by reflecting on the contingent self, *cogito ergo sum*. The Easterner begins by reflecting on the Existent, *sum ergo cogito*—'I exist, therefore I think.'

The Hindu takes his stand on the Infinite. He feels more sure of it than of his own existence. Its metaphysical rigour colours his outlook on life. Awed by its transcendence and immanence, he finds all other realities to be mere transitory fictions. The only reality is the ineffable reality of the Infinite. Although words cannot convey his point of view, Rabindranath Tagore comes closest to the idea.

Where spreads the infinite sky for the soul
to take her flight,
there reigns the stainless white radiance.
There is no day or night,
and never, never a word.

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Such a profundity could be expressed only by silence. Silence is more appreciated than eloquence. It is the mark of the profound thinker. Sankara, the great philosopher, declares in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, that the teacher, Bahva, when questioned by Bashkalin about the Infinite, answered him by remaining silent. He said to Bashkalin: 'Learn Brahman, O friend', and said nothing more. On a second, and third, questioning, he replied: 'I am indeed teaching you. But you do not understand. The Infinite is Silence.'⁴

Another great sage, Sanatkumara, expounded the Infinite to his pupil Narada by saying:

Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the finite.⁵

The Infinite has two aspects: positive and negative. To understand the full meaning of the term Infinite, we must investigate it from both aspects. From the positive side, the Infinite includes everything. From its negative side, it means nothing. Beyond Infinity, there is nothing. The Sanskrit word for nothing is *Abhava*.

But *Abhava* is not equivalent to nothing. In Hindu metaphysics, we find not one but four species of nothing.

previous nothing	(<i>pragabhava</i> : antecedent non-existence
subsequent nothing	(<i>pradhvamsabhava</i>): consequent non-existence
exclusive nothing	(<i>anyonyabhava</i>): reciprocal non-existence
absolute nothing	(<i>atyantabhava</i>) ⁶ : absolute non-existence

This classification of 'nothing' is necessary if we are to appreciate the finer points of the doctrine of the Infinite in the Hindu tradition. It helps us to avoid the superficial misinterpretation of that tradition.

It must be noted first that Hindu logicians admit no syllogism as valid which does not find expression in a concrete example. The Hindu syllogism may appear involved and cumbersome compared to the Greek. But in demanding an example drawn from reality the Hindu avoids misrepresentations of pure positivism, idealism, or subjectivism. The Hindu can always produce guarantees of the sound epistemological basis of his concepts.

Previous nothing has no beginning but it has an end. Its end is the realization of possibilities in actualities. The house which I have finished building today was not there a year ago. Until it was built, it was nothing. Its nothingness ended when the house existed. This

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nothingness had no beginning, then. But it had an end.

Subsequent nothing is the opposite of previous nothing. It is the nothing that results when a jar is broken into pieces. The pieces might conceivably be put together again, restoring the original shape of the jar. However, the original jar no longer exists, it cannot be restored. The repaired jar is not the original but a different jar. The subsequent nothing had its beginning the moment the jar was broken. Its nothingness is conceived as an endlessly protracted future.

Previous nothing provides what we need to appreciate the metaphysical implications of creation from previous nothing. While subsequent nothing helps us to understand the deeper significance of eschatology—"the end of the World".

What must be stressed here, however, is that previous and subsequent nothing represent realities which are contained in the Infinite. They are aspects of the Infinite power of God. In other words, they are realities and are included in the orbit of Infinite Reality. This will become clear as we proceed. For the present, we simply stress the point that previous and subsequent nothing are realities and are therefore not nothing in the usual sense of the word.

Exclusive nothing has to do with the fact that a jar is not a piece of cloth. A horse is not a dog. It is formally recognized under the type: S is not P. This type, when based on reality (as it must be in Hindu philosophy) is in no sense an empty play of letters. It is a genuine reality. Hence, exclusive nothing, according to the Hindu metaphysician, is also contained in the Infinite, the luminous source of every reality and truth. It is, then, also reality, not nothingness in the usual sense.

Absolute nothing can be found in a typical example of contradiction in terms: 'the son of a *barren* woman'. Since non-fertility (barrenness) and fertility (the son) are asserted about the same subject (the woman) in the same sense and under the same aspect, there is an implied contradiction (*virodha*).

In this classic example, the relation of birth to a barren woman involves a contradiction. Such a relation is not only factually non-existent but cannot exist even as possibility. It is a mistaken relation based on absolute nothing. 'No system of Hindu thought, not even that of Sankara, accepts the view of mere "*mentalis*".'

The word Indian philosophers use for the principle of contradiction is *nirvirodha tattva* or 'The Principle of Non-contradiction'. Its classical name is *vandhyaputra-nyaya*. This is the bed-rock of all rea-

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soning about reality in Hinduism.

The principle of contradiction exposes the 'absolute nothingness' of relations which imply contradiction in terms. I can certainly think 'the woman is barren'. I can also think 'she is not barren'. Yet, I cannot think, and it cannot be in fact, that she is and is not barren at the same time. This would mean that '*is* equals *not is*', which is absurd.

In the strict sense, therefore, unreality (*a-sat*) is synonymous with 'absolute nothing'. Unreality is the outcome of contradiction, and for philosophical convenience it is conceived as a category by Indian thinkers. It follows that whatever rigorously excludes all unreality and contradiction will be the 'Reality of realities' (*satyasya satyam*). It is accepted by the Hindus as the Infinite Truth, which neither deceives nor is deceived. The Supreme Reality is predicated in Hindu thought upon the Infinite, since it is a reality which excludes 'absolute nothing'.

Take another example. Two plus two equals five ($2+2=5$). This is an unreal statement. Two apples plus two apples never make five apples. The contradiction and consequent unreality vitiate the whole statement, since the first figure two, representing things in the world, stands for two units; the second figure two, similarly representing real units, when added to the first two, make in all four units ($2+2=4$). The figure five in the statement ($2+2=5$) is also real. It stands for five real units. The five cannot be four, since they are four and one more. Making what is not four equal to four implies contradiction, unreality, however real the units may be. This is absolute nothing.

The reality of the units, metaphysically considered, is drawn from the Infinite. Yet, the incorrectness of the equation is a result of contradiction, implying unreality, and this cannot be drawn from the Infinite. Its unreality is identical with absolute nothing, which is excluded from the Infinite.

On a plane lower than that of the metaphysical, that of the sciences, physical or moral, we can and should speak of degrees of rightness and wrongness. On the highest plane, the only reality is the Infinite (*anantam*=non-ending). Whatever is unsustained in principle (*tattvatah*) by the Infinite is clearly absolute nothing (*atyantabhava*). Absolute nothing and Infinite are sometimes called bipolar (*pratiyogi*) in Hindu doctrine. But the bipolarity is nominal, since the connotation of absolute nothing does not compromise the Infinite by lowering it from the plane of Absolute Reality to that of relative reality.

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It is important to note at this point the distinction between Infinity as it is described in Hindu doctrine and Infinity as it is found in Western sources. In modern science, the professional scientist often uses the term Infinite even though it is not with reference to the Infinite that excludes absolute nothing (*anantam*) but only in terms of the finite (*santam*), the indefinite (*a-parimitam*), or at most, the incalculable (*a-san-khyam*).

It is incorrect to conceive the Infinite as the sum total of a series, however extended. This would be the indefinite. The Infinite, in the sense used here, is not the result of a process. It is the Ultimate Principle of whatever is not self-contradictory. Non-contradiction (*nir-virodha*) being polar to contradiction (*virodha*), from the point of view of Hindu logic, the Principle of Non-Contradiction is identified analogically with the Infinite. This would be a consistently 'Logical View' of the Godhead.

Since the Infinite is the Ultimate Principle of all reality and excludes absolute nothing, it is clear that there cannot be two Infinities. If two were proposed for argument's sake, each must exclude the other to be two numerically, but the Infinite in the Hindu sense, *anantam*, excludes only absolute nothing. In this sense, the Infinite can be only One. It has to be One with unique singularity, for the very good reason that there can be no second like it (it is peerless). In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the doctrine is explicitly stated as 'One only, without a second': '*ekamevadvitiam*' (VI, 2).

If human language must be used and the term being applied to the Infinite, this is done in a purely analogical sense—as is well understood in Hindu tradition. 'What no speech can express but that by which speech itself speaks, know that alone to be the Infinite and not this which the common people worship.'

yad vachanabhyuditam yena vag-abhyudate
tad-eva Brahma tvam viddhi nedam yadidamupasate. KU. I. 4

'What no mind can comprehend but that by which they say the mind is comprehended, know that alone to be the Infinite and not this which the common people worship.'

yan-mansa na manute yenahur mano matam
tad-eva Brahma tvam viddhi, nedam yadidamupaste. KU. I. 5

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THE NATURE OF THE INFINITE

We are in a position now to fathom the Reality and Truth in the light of Hindu teaching about the Infinite and nothing. The word *sat* means being which is sustained by the Infinite, and at the same time, absolutely transcended by the Infinite. Moreover, the same word *sat*, correctly understood, can also be used analogically to designate the Infinite as the Supreme Being. According to the context, the word *sat* may mean the true (cf., Old English: sooth), and in that sense, is eminently applied to the Infinite, expressing in analogical language 'the Infinitely True'. In point of doctrine, '*esse et verum convertuntur*', (being and truth are convertible). In India too, one word (i.e., *sat*) indeed serves freely for both notions: 'being and truth'.

Here, we have the correct approach to the Infinite. No Aristotelian need be troubled by the translation of *sat* as being and *aśat* as absolute nothing. The principle of the Excluded Middle is not violated by the special sense in which we have defined these terms. Moreover, Aristotelian metaphysics does not contemplate the Infinite (*anantam*) in the sense of that which excludes only absolute nothing, but in the sense of the merely indefinite (*aparimitam*).⁸ Hegel did not hesitate to declare, against Aristotle, that existence is the same as non-existence! The Hindu would add, in principle, i.e., in God.

The truth about anything therefore necessarily puts us in touch with the Infinite.⁹ To know the whole truth about my dog lying at my feet, it is not enough to know only my particular dog. I must know something about the species 'dog', or in philosophical terms, the universal dog. I will still not know the whole truth about the dog until I go beyond the universal dog to its Ultimate principle, uniting this particular dog 'principally' with the Reality of all Realities (*satyasya satyam*), and therefore with all particular realities—actual and possible dogs. Then only do I have the whole truth about this dog. All other truths about it are relative and all other considerations secondary.

Sankara has a metaphysical lyric on the theme. We quote one verse:

*Drishyate shruyate yadyad Brahmanonyanna tadbhavet tattva-jnanash-
cha tad-Brahma Sachchidanandamadvayam. Atmabodha. 64.*¹⁰

Whatsoever the eye seeth and the ear heareth exists not but for the Infinite; yes, by principal insight, that Infinite-Reality is contemplated as transcendent Being-Knowledge-Bliss.

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The consequences of this doctrine would require a special study in itself. We shall content ourselves by noting that among Hindus the Supreme Principle is analogically spoken of as *sat, chit, ananda*: i.e., 'Being', 'Knowledge', 'Bliss', indivisibly One in indivisible identity, named *sat-chid-ananda* in one synthetic word. This is the absolute Reality analogically declared by its name to be One and Indivisible: *akhandā sachchid-anandam*.¹¹

All opposition vanishes in this name, since 'Being' and 'truth' are united in 'Bliss' by absolute identity. This puts us in the transcendent absolute of Godhead—above and beyond all differences. This alone is the Absolute Reality to which every relative dependent reality of the visible world points—if we had the eyes to see through the analogical veils and enigmas of creation.

In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 'the one who knows the Infinite Reality attains to the Highest': *brahma-vid apnoti param*.¹²

The Infinite-Reality is Reality in the sense of absolute Truth (*satyam*), Knowledge in the sense of Ineffable Wisdom (*jnanam*), and Infinite in the sense of that which excludes only absolute nothing (*anantam*): *satyam jnanam anantam brahma*.¹³ The *Upanishad* continues: 'He who knows this Infinite-Reality to be hidden in the deepest recess of the highest heaven (within his heart) attains all desires together, i.e., communion with the Omniscient Infinite.'

*Yo veda nihitam guhayam paramo vyoman sosnute
sarvan kaman soha Brahmana vipasciteti. Up. II. 1*

The *Bhagavad-Gita* calls such a seer a 'seer of reality' or (in the sense defined above) a 'seer of principles' (*tattvadarshin*). If unreality or absolute nothing is named technically non-being (*a-sat*), and reality is likewise technically named being (*sat*), then the traditional Hindu teaching is that the one cannot spring from the other: 'The unreal hath no being, the real never ceaseth to be. The limitations of both have been seen by the seers of first principles.'

*nasato vidyate bhavo nabhavo vidyate satah
ubhyorapi drishto' ntas-tvanayos-tattvadarsibhih.*

When speaking of the Infinite, we must do so by rising above the evidence of our senses (*pratyaksa pramana*) with the aid of pure intelligence (*buddhi*). The knowledge of individual particulars enables us

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to rise above them to the analogical contemplation and cognition (*dhiyalamba*) of the Supreme Universal, which gives them reality and existence.

The seer, who sees the Infinite reflected in every particular manifestation of the Infinite, notwithstanding limitations that necessarily divide the particular from the Infinite, recognizes a fundamental similarity in every particular manifestation, uniting the particulars among themselves to their common universal and, through the latter, uniting them to their Ultimate Principle, the Infinite.

What kind of ultimate unity is this, uniting the many particulars to the one Infinite? Is this the old dilemma of Greek philosophy, the one and the many? The unity which the discriminating Hindu mind recognizes as necessary and internal is the unity of 'principle', *tattvatah*. What is limited (*santam*) cannot be identified with what is illimited (*anantam*). The identification has to be sought and is to be admitted only 'in principle', *tattvatah*, in the sense explained. Then the seer truly sees and may be hailed as a seer of the limitations of things, especially the limitations of a finite 'reality' (which is seen to be sustained 'principially' and at the same time absolutely transcended by the Infinite) and the limitations of absolute nothing.

Orthodox Hindu doctrine recorded in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* maintains that the Infinite-Reality is the One God (*Eko devah*), hidden within all creatures (*sarvabhutesu gudhah*), all-embracing (*sarva-vyapi*), the Inner-Self of all beings *sarva-bhutantaratma*, the Watcher and Judge of all works (*kar ma-dhyaksha*), the Lord dwelling in all beings (*sarvabhutadhipasah*), the Divine-Witness (*sakshi*), the Divine Knower (*Chita*), the Only One free from limitations (*kevalo nirgunashcha*).

*eko devah sarvabhutesu gudhah
sarvavyapi sarvabhutantaratma
karmadhyaksha sarvabhutadhipasah
sakshi chita kevalo nirgunashcha* *SUp. VI. 11.*

If these are not the characteristics of an Infinite Personal God, words have no meaning. Therefore, the unitary ultimate reality of the seer is the One, who is personal. We may even refer to the Godhead as supra-personal but never impersonal.

* Together with this verse, another is generally taken to be relevant. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Infinite Reality is emphatically distinguished

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from *sat* as well as from *a-sat*. 'I will proclaim that which should be known; for, when it is known, immortality is enjoyed. The Beginningless, Supreme Brahman is neither *sat* nor *a-sat*.'

*Jneyam yattat pravaksyami yajjnatvamritamashnute
anadimat param Brahma na sat tan-nasaduchyate. BG, XIII.12*

Those initiated in Hindu tradition find the traditional texts perfectly intelligible. No interpretation is admitted which does not confirm the fundamentals of traditional orthodox doctrine. The texts of the *Upanishads* or that of the *Bhagavad-Gita* quoted here, in which *sat* and *a-sat* occur in juxtaposition, provide a test of this claim. The orthodoxy of the doctrine of Infinite-Reality (*Brahma*) remains unimpaired whether we translate *a-sat* by 'not-being', making it the category which excludes 'being', or 'non-being', and 'no-being', identical, that is, with 'absolute nothing'—no reality at all. Both interpretations would be admitted in orthodox doctrine. It is neither finite being (*sat*) nor absolute nothing (*a-sat*). But if *sat* is taken to mean Being (God) then the denial of *sat* to God would signify the denial that God is impersonal.

Since the Omnipresent Infinite is also Omniscient, this *sruti* declares that the Infinite-Reality is Godhead transcendently personal to each of us. The Hindu Scriptures, further, go on to say that while God is not known directly, indeed is unknowable by the unaided intellect, even though that intellect is directed to the study of the scriptures, yet God is knowable through His self-revelation to the person whom He favours. Hence, it seems that the *Upanishads* teach a doctrine of divine grace, and conceive the Infinite as God in a personal sense, which the great theologian, Ramanuja took pains to show us in his writings.

ADVAITA: TRANSCENDENT GOD

Let us now consider the problem of how to define the relation of the finite to the Infinite in the light of Hindu ideas of the Infinite. The term *advaita* is used to convey the absolute transcendence of the Infinite and all relations with it. *Advaita* means literally not-two-ness (Sanskrit: *a-dvai-ta*=Latin: *non-dualitas*.) But by itself this would hardly convey its meaning to the reader.

There is no single term that translates *advaita* satisfactorily into any European language. Leaving aside absolute-uniqueness, the

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nearest equivalent would be transcendence, if transcendence is given its absolute meaning to preserve both its uniqueness and immanence.

In western philosophy, transcendence is loosely predicated not only of the Infinite, but also (with implied and analogical safeguards) of 'the one', the 'true', the 'good', and the 'beautiful'. Generally, in the East, however, the Infinite is beyond the limitation of category and can only be spoken of analogically as 'the one', the 'true', the 'good', and the 'beautiful': *ekam-satyam-sivam-sundaram*. None of these 'transcendentals' are properly accepted as correct and appropriate when speaking even analogically of the Infinite: the only appropriate analogical term is *advaita* in the sense of absolute transcendence, beyond the limitations of unity and the other synonyms of unity detailed above.

All names and forms are inadequate, suffering from limitation in one respect or another. Some Hindus prefer therefore to use the word 'Being', making sure beforehand that the context allows no misconstruction of meaning by a confusion of 'Being' with 'being', in the sense clarified here. Others prefer 'Not-being' as less liable to error and as the most refined expression that might be applied analogically to the Infinite. Consequently, traditional texts will be found by an orthodox Hindu (for whom they are revealed *sruti*), to allow both these means of expression as orthodox avenues of approach. For example, *Chhandogya Upanishad*, III. 19.1, which tells us the origin of the world from an egg might seem to some scholars to contradict *Chhandogya Upanishad*, VI. 3. 1, which speaks of the three origins. But the Hindu philosophers, especially the Upanishadic ones, reconcile the apparent contradiction by giving a 'compromise' explanation. One seer cannot contradict another, if both are indeed seers. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II. 6, both currents of the tradition are preserved: both are found not only to be perfectly orthodox but mutually complementary when properly interpreted in the 'traditional way'.

This is perhaps confusing to non-Hindu students who disdain the guidance of the Hindu interpreter and rely on 'etymologies' for the meaning of traditional texts. This is not intended to deny the danger of 'traditional' interpretations which may read meanings and ideas into ancient texts based on later philosophical developments. The commentaries of the great schools are full of cases such as this, often mutually contradictory in the eyes of 'modern' critics.

Perhaps this accounts for the difficulty experienced by many scholars when grappling with *advaita* for the first time. They labour to

speak and write of the 'ontology' of the *Vedānta*, which for our purpose is incorrect. Ontology treats of metaphysical issues under the formality of 'being,' while *Vedānta* is concerned with the Supreme Principle which is neither being (*sat*) nor non-being (*a-sat*).

We could deal more fully with *advaita* by grouping realities which do not come under the category of 'being' under that of 'not-being'. This category would of course have to be distinguished from reality, as *no-being* or *non-being*, which were identified here with 'absolute nothing', no reality at all. The qualified Hindu teacher keeps these meanings distinct, although it happens that both 'not-being', in the sense defined, and no reality, i.e., 'non-being' or 'no-being', in the sense indicated here, could be expressed by the same Sanskrit word, *a-sat*, and elucidated according to the context.

The translation of *advaita* by 'monism' shows that the terminology generally employed by scholars has failed to produce a term to express the idea of absolute transcendence conveyed by our exposition of the word.

'Absolute Uniqueness' might come closer to our meaning, if we take this compound expression in a simple, singular connection. Such equivalents are misleading, however. *Advaita* has nothing in common with monism, whether 'spiritual', 'material', or in fact, with any limitation or specification, however elementary.

What is absolutely transcendent surpasses the confines of all limitation, even that of the most primary, like unity, unless understood analogically. Moreover, 'being', which is accepted as absolutely transcendent of all categories and limitation in the West (with analogical reservations for the Infinite 'Being' is rigorously circumscribed in the schools of the East to 'being' as such (*ens qua tale*) and is therefore inadmissible as a term applicable to the Infinite, except analogically (Ramanuja).

Apart from the ordinary arguments of the Asian divines, we might adduce one or two considerations from Hindu sources which would awaken some interest in the reader. 'Silence', for example, is accepted as a reality by all; it does not imply contradiction and therefore cannot be identified with absolute nothing. Yet, 'silence', which indeed is one of the most profound realities, serving as a symbol for meditating on God, the unutterable Reality of all realities, is clearly not 'being'. 'Being' is the principle of manifestation, but silence is not the principle of any manifestation. Like 'being', silence is a non-manifest reality, in no way to be confused with 'being'. The reality of

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'being' is therefore limited by the reality of 'silence', both having to be sustained in reality by a principle which is itself neither 'being' nor 'silence', but something transcending the limitations of 'being' and of 'silence'.

Again, take the example of perfect 'emptiness' (*sunyata*). Perfect emptiness implies no contradiction and is therefore a reality. Physicists may not admit a perfect vacuum in the realm of the physical or manifest world, but a perfect vacuum can be contemplated serenely by the metaphysician as a non-manifest possibility. The Hindu regards perfect 'emptiness' as a reality belonging to the non-manifest sphere, but in no way to be confused with 'being', though 'being', like 'emptiness', is non-manifest. Here, once again we have to conclude that the reality of 'being' is further limited by the reality of 'emptiness', all limited realities being ultimately sustained in reality by an illimited or Infinite Supreme Principle which is itself beyond all limitations and absolutely transcendent. Perfect 'emptiness' can therefore serve as a support for meditation on the 'Unfathomable Depth' of the Reality of all realities which is Infinite. It is from emptiness of this sort or nothing of this sort, beyond human ken or sense experience, pregnant with possibilities, that the world is accepted as created.

The positive approach which treats the Infinite under the positive formality of 'Being' is extensively cultivated in the schools of Ramanuja and other Vaishnava teachers. But the negative method appeals to the more intellectual types among Hindus. Students of this aspect of Hinduism will find that 'Silence', (*mauna*), is the favourite means of realization of what is implied by the Infinite in intellectual cognition and life, employed by the Saivas whose chief authority is Sankara, and that 'Emptiness', (as explained above, signifying 'unfathomability', (*sunyata*)) is the mode of thought and expression most diligently explored, for instance, by the Buddhists, whose greatest protagonist is Nagarjuna; Sankara, in fact, builds on Nagarjuna. How far those who use this term *sunyata* today understand it in this metaphysical way would require much research!

These considerations have often seemed strange to some philosophers, many of whom have not hesitated to apply labels like 'quietism' and 'nihilism' to doctrines which in the East intend often enough to convey the Ineffable Fullness and Inscrutable Infinitude of the Godhead.

Consider a third position: that the relation of the finite to the Infinite is a relation of absolute 'not-two-ness' (*advaita*) and you dis-

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cover that there is no contradiction or compromise. Neither finitude nor infinitude are compromised and the position, being purely negative, avoids all possibility of confusion. Mature consideration shows that this is the only position which allows the finite full scope to live and move and have its being in the Infinite, without loss of meaning on either side. *Advaita* satisfactorily defines the relation between the finite and Infinite; and the most appropriate and correct predication of the Infinite itself is on the Infinite being 'not-two' (*a-dvayam*).

The cognate term *a-dvayam* (not-two) is basic to the term *advaitam* and stresses the 'uniqueness' of the Infinite in absolute transcendence of all categories and limitations. At the same time, full scope is allowed for expression of the transcendental aspects of Godhead without divorcing them from the Godhead's fundamentally transcendental Uniqueness. Beyond this point, words fail to convey more than a symbolic meaning and serve only as supports for meditation on the Ineffable Mystery (*rahasyam*) of the Infinite.

In brief, the fundamental issue is as follows: to say that the relation of the finite to the Infinite is a relation of Absolute One-ness (monism) must be inadmissible to Hindu tradition. If one understands what monism implies! Oneness in the monistic sense would compromise the Infinite by making the Infinite finite and involve us in a contradiction. But to say that the relation of the finite to the Infinite is a relation of Absolute Two-ness (dualism) is again inadmissible to the Hindu. Such a relation would absolutely exclude the finite from the Infinite and thereby necessarily limit the Infinite. The Infinite excludes only absolute nothing; so that, if it is supposed to exclude anything else but absolute nothing, the Infinite is again compromised and loses its meaning.

This is how Hindu tradition describes the absolute transcendence of God, and the utter uniqueness of His Reality. It is: *neti, neti* (not this, not that); *ekamadvaitam* (One, without a second or One, without an equal).

ATMAN: THE IMMANENT GOD

The presence of God in all creatures is one of the clearest principles of Indian philosophy. It is expressed by the word, *atman*.

Atman, smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest, dwells in the hearts of creatures.¹⁴

The divine Lord, being all-pervading, omnipresent, and benevolent, dwells in the hearts of all beings.¹⁵

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This is a general consequence of the doctrine of the immensity of God and the divine conservation of the world.

But Indian philosophers make a special case of the indwelling of God within the human soul or heart. God dwells there in a special and most intimate way.

Here within the heart is a cavity; therein he dwells, the Lord of the Universe, the Governor of the Universe, the Chief of the Universe.¹⁶

A number of *Upanishads* and other Vedic works agree: *Angushthamatrah-purusha*, a person of the measure of a thumb, that is, God, is seated within the lotus-shaped heart of man.¹⁷ This idea is similarly found in later ascetics and even among modern philosophers. Arunandi, a South Indian Siddhantist, says that, 'just as the soul lives with the senses which do not know themselves, and makes them know, in the same way Siva lives with the soul which does not know itself and makes it known'.¹⁸ Manika Vasagar exclaims: 'My father and my Master: Thou hast made this frame Thine home!'¹⁹ And Kabir addresses himself thus:

Do not go to the garden of flowers,

O friend! go not there.

In your body is the garden of flowers,

Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus,

And there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.²⁰

The Lord of redemptive Love sets aside

his cosmic glory and Isvaratva, and delights

to dwell in the hearts of all beings in spite

of the filthiness of the body.²¹

Yet according to the *Upanishads*, this special indwelling of God in the soul of man is not universal or without conditions. The *Brihadaranyaka* says:

Him know I, being wise, as my own soul, Immortal,
the Immortal Brahma.²²

In this passage, the expression 'being wise' does not mean 'if I am wise', for then to see Brahma in this way as my own soul would be a fiction, without real objectivity. Rather, it means 'because I am wise'; that is, because I already have God, or 'because I am God's child'. This is precisely what is said in the Book of Proverbs: 'In the

heart of the prudent resteth Wisdom.' (14. 33).

St. Paul writes to the Romans:

You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. *Rom.* 8. 9

and to the Corinthians:

Know you not, that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God; and you are not your own?
6. 19

It is not just the Holy Spirit but the Trinity that dwells in man.

If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him.
John. 14. 23

God truly dwells within us, in the abode which we are.²³
He is nearer to us than we to ourselves.²⁴

The doctrine that God⁶ lives personally in man's heart is maintained by the Hindu. That indeed is the achievement of Hinduism and the kernel of a primordial tradition tenaciously preserved through the ages. It gives the Hindu a self-respect and strength of spirit which cannot be taken from him.

Together with the absolute transcendence of God, *advaita*, discussed previously, the Hindu tradition maintains the absolute immanence of the Infinite, with no loss of meaning to the former. We must first of all give up thinking of the Immanence of God as some kind of fourth-dimensional reality. It is non-dimensional, nothing like time or space, but transcending both.

There is no need for a symbol, except initially as a help and support for the mind. The Infinite may be expressed through *silence*. All creatures are sustained in existence by an Infinite Creator in whom they live and move and have their being, but who in Himself is unrelated to them. God is their *raison d'être*; but as the Supreme Principle of all manifestation, God is beyond mere manifestation, beyond mere being, as such. Therefore, God is eminently non-manifest. There can be no reciprocity of relation between the manifest and non-manifest, much less any material identity.

In the metaphysical sphere, each particular is clearly distinct from

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its universal. Every particular has its own peculiar limitations distinct from those of its immediate universal. That immediate universal, in its turn, is ultimately dependent on the Supreme Limitless Universal, the Infinite, while clearly remaining distinct from the Infinite for similar reasons of limitation. All limited particulars and universals are sustained in their limited, 'special', and 'qualified' reality of dependent existence, value and significance by the Infinite Universal and seen by the metaphysician to be impounded in the Infinite, 'as in their Supreme Principle'.

Taken dependently, the universe of manifestation, due to its intrinsic limitation and entitative dependence, can never stand comparison metaphysically with the Infinitude of the Supreme Principle, which holds all actual and possible manifestations at their source. All creation serves its purpose entirely in the quality of 'support' (*pratika*) for contemplation (*dhyana*), mystical consideration (*dharana*) and mystical rapture or ecstasy (*samadhi*), by which one should rise to the transcendent knowledge of the Supreme Reality of all realities. Since the Supreme Reality transcends all limitations and conditions and is ultimately itself, the ineffable fullness of the Truth of all truths, (this is Sankara's position) it is uncompromisingly certain that the transcendent Infinity of the Supreme Principle is the ultimate Absolute Reality to which everything else serves merely as a pointer. In a word, *advaita* is concerned with an ineffable position implying 'immanence absolute' and transcendence absolute.

Understood in this manner, there is and can be no question of confusing the manifest universe with the non-manifest Supreme Principle. If there is no question of confusing even the particular with the universal or of mistaking the limited universal for the Supreme Universal, how can there be any possibility in orthodox Hindu tradition of materially identifying the world and God, as is done by modern theosophists? While affirming the transcendence of the Infinite in a manner that can leave no intelligent person in doubt, the Hindu scriptures and the Hindu tradition at the same time assert the immanence of God, which also leaves no doubt concerning the most intimate and inalienable relation that exists between the finite and the Infinite.

What is that relation? In what way is the Infinite immanent in the world? In the concrete religion, of course, both the Christian and Hindu mystics understood this well when they spoke of union with God. The soul of the just man is but a paradise in which, God tells us, He takes His delight. What do you imagine must that dwelling be in

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which a King so mighty, so wise and so pure, containing in Himself all good, can delight to rest? Nothing can be compared to the great beauty and capabilities of the soul; however keen our intellects may be, they are as unable to comprehend them as to comprehend God, for, as He told us He created us in His own image and likeness.²⁵

Eusebius of Caesarea relates that Leonidas, the father of Origen, who later died a martyr for Christ's sake, used to kneel by the bedside of the sleeping boy and devoutly and reverently 'kiss his bare breast as the tabernacle wherein God dwelt.'²⁶

The *Upanishads* try to express this indwelling of God 'like a light without smoke',²⁷ 'Of sun-like appearance',²⁸ and Manika Vasagar calls God, 'Thou, Light shining within the very soul of me'.²⁹ Fray Luis de Granada's explanation fits well with the Upanishadic teaching. He writes:

It is true that grace makes our hearts the abode of God, and if God, according to St. John is the Light which enlighteneth every man coming into this world, it is evident that the more pure and holy a soul is, the more resplendently will the rays of God's brightness shine upon it, just as the rays of the sun are reflected more perfectly by a mirror, in proportion to the cleanness and uniformity of the mirror's surface.³⁰

The Hindu has always looked upon God as within, not as 'up', 'over there'. This inward search for God, perhaps led him to certain excesses, identifying God with nature or with self. But he has also tried to extricate himself from these excesses, and at the same time, strongly insisted on the abiding presence of God in the world and His intimate presence in man. He is the *atman* of his *atman*—the Soul of his soul, the Self of his self. *Atman*, therefore, expresses correctly the theistic immanence of God.

Metaphysically speaking, it is generally admitted that there lingers a doubt in the Hindu tradition about the relationship of the world to God. Here we appreciate the position of Ramanuja in his interpretation of the relation of the finite to the Infinite in his *vishishtadvaita*. It is an interpretation in which the absolute transcendence of the Infinite is maintained, while recognizing fully the eternal relation which constitutes the innermost bond between the limited, 'special', and 'qualified' reality of the finite on the one hand

and the Infinite Reality of the Supreme Principle on the other, notwithstanding its independence, illimitedness, and transcendent universality. Therefore, the relation is not only essential and necessary on the part of the limited realities, which owe their entity to it, but has to be recognized by the metaphysician as an eternal and inalienable relation. We will not do justice to Hindu thought if we do not try to understand what the Hindu means by this abiding immanence. First of all, such a relation is a real relation because it implies no contradiction. Secondly, let it be carefully noted that the dependent reality of the world, however real its relation to God, cannot without contradiction be confused with the independent reality of the Infinite.

The Sanskrit word, *tat-tvatah*, which we have translated as principle comes closer to conveying this relational idea of the Indian theistic philosopher. The meaning of the word *tat-tva*, as given by Monier-Williams in his Sanskrit Dictionary, is 'true or real state, truth, reality. In philosophy, its meaning is 'true principle'.³¹ Therefore, in order to understand *tat-tva* we must enquire into the meaning of the word principle.

Principle, which originates from the Latin word, *principium*, whose Greek equivalent is *arche* (αρχη) means literally 'beginning, or origin' and designates in general, 'that from which something proceeds in some way'. When we speak of really existing things, principle denotes the cause of something that comes to be or of an event. However, principle is not 'cause'. Thus, the principle can be its own sufficient reason as is the case with the Supreme Principle, God, where the principle and that which proceeds from the principle are identical without any distinction or differentiation. But, in the finite beings, that which proceeds from the principle is absolutely distinct from the Principle itself which is God. The Principle in both cases of the finite and the Infinite is identically the same. This is beautifully expressed in *advaita* philosophy by the word *tat-tva* meaning principle, but which is in reality the shortened form of *tat-tvam* meaning That (art) thou.³² It emphasizes on the one hand the identity of the whole with the one eternal *brahman* (*tad*) and expresses at the same time the difference between the finite and the Infinite by *tva* (*tvam*, meaning thou).

Tattva (Principle), therefore, means 'the origin, the ground and the fathomless depth of all realities'. It bases the principles of all being, knowledge and goodness on God as the one and absolute Principle. This raises God from the ontological level to a pre-ontological stage,

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since at the ontological level the principle is determined and becomes the finite. A simple analogy drawn from elementary mathematics may be helpful.

Take for instance any general formula of algebra: $(a+b)^2 = a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$. This formula excludes all other formulae in algebra and to that extent is limited. But it is indefinitely rich in its own way. It is the basis for any number of particular applications. We can give any number of meanings to 'a' and 'b', e.g., $a=2$ or 3 or 6 or 8, etc. And $b=4$ or 1 or 5 or 9, etc. In every case, the formula does its job and gives the correct answer. These particular applications, each distinct from the others, are distinguished from the original formula by their particular limitations; yet they are so dependent on the original formula for their value and meaning that if the original formula loses its truth, the particular applications lose their basis or principle, and consequently lose everything that gave them mathematical value, meaning, and significance.

The general formula, therefore, recalls an indefinite number of special applications with the clear realization that the general formula can always transcend and does transcend all the special applications that can be made by the human mind.

In a similar way, particular truths evidently depend on the Universal Truth necessarily and essentially, in a bond of principal relationship which is eternal. It follows, therefore, that if we seek to arrive at the whole truth about anything, we must exclude 'absolutely nothing' from our consideration of it, and excluding 'absolute nothing' from our consideration of it, and by excluding absolute nothing, we shall find that we can exclude only 'absolutely nothing' (*atyantabhava*). That means that no finite reality of any kind is possible without being wholly related in principle or identified in principle with the infinite, which alone can give it identity or meaning, while absolutely transcending it. That is the 'Immanence', the abiding presence of the *atman* in the universe.

TAT TVAM ASI : GOD AND THE SOUL

Atman, as we said at the beginning, also stands for the conscientious individual personality. Hence, there arises another relationship—the relationship of the 'soul' to God. Indian monotheism stands or falls on the right understanding of this relationship.

It must be said from the outset that, similar to overtly monotheistic religions, Hindu tradition also draws a clear distinction between the

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'soul' and 'God' in man. The limits of human nature are marked off from those of 'personality' in man. The conscious personality in man is *jivatman* (soul) and the personality of the Supreme Self is *paramatman* (God). The subject matter of the Vedanta is precisely the relation of the 'soul' to God. This aspect of the doctrine can best be studied in the schools of the great Hindu theologians, who work out and wrangle over every significant distinction to their heart's content, often with apparently exclusive and irreconcilable results.

A true knowledge of the essential nature of the Supreme Being is believed to confer immortality on the knower by making him realize his identity with the eternal Absolute. It is a knowledge which is not by any means theoretical or to be picked out of books on one's own, or acquired without a qualified teacher. It requires a childlike disposition of heart, and makes a man die sevenfold to himself and live selflessly and divinely in the world as God's trustee and representative. It is a transforming knowledge. It is a realization: *brahmarid brahmaiva bhavati*.

God is regarded as the light of man's life, the Truth of every truth man learns, and the One Supreme Principle through which man can reverently know that he is indissolubly united with all that exists and can exist.

In itself, the Supreme Principle transcends all limitations and determinations, even that of unity, and in analogical speech alone, may be referred to as 'not two' (*advayam*) in order to put its absolute transcendence beyond doubt. Here 'silence', which has no meaning for the world, and peace, which surpasses all understanding, fills the heart with the goodness of God and ineffable bliss.

The knower of God (when the *jivatman* acquires the knowledge of God) is no longer a selfish individual. All knots of ignorance in his heart have been loosened. He continues to live and function, but in the spirit of 'I, yet not I'. Divine 'knowledge' has made him realize there is only 'One First Person' and it is utter blindness on man's part to speak in self-praise or act with self-confidence dissociated from the Infinite. Knowing the Infinite, there remains absolutely nothing to be known. In that Divine 'knowledge' all is declared and transformed. It declares in human words the Supreme Principle known to the mind as the Divine Tri-unity of aspects (Being-Knowledge-Bliss) constituted in the highest personal selfhood.

Etad jneyan nityamevatmasanstham

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*Natah param veditavyam hi kinchid
Bhokta bhogyam preritaram cha matva
Sarvam proktam Trividham Brahman etat.*³³

When the Enjoyer (*Bhokta*), the object of Enjoyment (*bhogyam*), and the actuating agent (*preritaram*) are known—everything is declared. That itself is the Supreme Triune Reality.

This (Supreme Reality) is to be known as eternally established in one's own Self. Indeed, there is nothing beyond this to be known.

Further, it is admitted that this knowledge cannot be acquired by human effort. It is imparted by God Himself to His elect. Only the strong and earnest can enter the Kingdom and maintain their poise. Neither sun nor moon shines there, the Supreme Being alone is the light of that world in which all else shines by reflected light. Everything here on earth is enlightened by His peerless light. In fear of Him, the winds blow, the sun shines, and death itself limps about.

Both the *Katha* and *Mundaka Upanishads* preserve a very ancient and interesting lore on the subject. They declare unequivocally that the finite cannot attain full truth in the Infinite without the help of the Infinite. As the Supreme Self, the Infinite is knowable only through His own self-revelation. It is entirely a question of *gratia gratis data* (a free gift), the grace of God. The text is:

*Nayam atma pravachanena labhyo
na medhaya na bahuna srutena.
Yamevaisa vrunute tena labhyas
tasyaisa atma vivrunute tanum Svam.*³⁴

Not by instruction may this Supreme-Self be gained, nor by intellect, nor by much scripture-learning. Whomsoever he chooses, by such may He be gained, to such a one this Supreme-Self reveals His own reality.

Now leaving aside the question of how the knowledge of God is acquired, whether by an insight or by intuition or by some kind of mystical experience granted to the knower by the grace of the Infinite, since it does not pertain to our problem, we ask what is of importance to our thesis, namely, how does this knowledge of God bring about an identity between the individual self and the Supreme Self and what is that identity?

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Here we come to the real crux of the matter. How can the finite attain unity and identification with the Infinite? Even in a purely 'principal' sense, which we discussed in the section on the Immanence of God recognizing one's true dependence on the Infinite, no concession was made to the unreality represented by the contradiction inherent in the finite posing as the Infinite. Jesus recognized this when he said, 'The Father is greater than I'.

If the Infinite, inasmuch as it is the Infinite, absolutely transcends the individual, then what is it in the finite that could be said to be identical with the Infinite? It cannot be its own being, because it is finite. Ontological identity is ruled out thereby. Where then, is the identity? One has to look for it at a deeper level, at the level of one's ultimate ground and principle, where the finite and the Infinite meet and where the Infinite is realised as the *raison d'être* of the finite.

The word 'identity' taken by itself signifies the most simple and obvious principle of logic and philosophy. But considering it as 'self identity', not as an experience reflecting external objects, it is given in the self-experience of the human subject. In the consciousness of self, the 'ego' knows itself as the self which persists throughout all the changes which affect it, as the individual self in contrast to all others, even in contrast to states, attitudes and actions which come and go within itself. It gives to all man's functions their unifying term of reference and intrinsic connection. This is primordial knowledge which refers only to itself. It is self-experience, presence of the self to itself, identification of the subject and object. All knowledge and all science is ultimately bound to look for justification in this human spirit's experience of self-identity. The *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes points to the secret focus of all knowledge.

Coming to the experience of the external world, Identity is not the sameness of dead objects nor is it something material. In that experience, as may be seen from the intrinsic structure of the relationship of identity, which is characterized by differentiation, the self knows itself and there appears a tension of subject-object in a wide sense and a duality in unity. It knows that its being and becoming can only take place as a permanent transition through the other. The character of identity, therefore, is dialectical, because all consciousness of self depends for its realization on the impulsion from 'without'—the other, whether it be the empirical object or the other person. As Hegel says, 'The power of the spirit is measured by its outgoing, its depths by the depths to which it entrusts itself in its self-explication.'⁸⁵ Here again

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appears a self-identification in the experience of the other (objects or person) and a differentiation of identity, either that of a happy or deprived selfhood.

Atman is a pure spirit, and every spirit must necessarily have a two-fold orientation: subject-object. Its act is a duality in unity, as could be seen from the relationship of the object to the subject in knowledge and relationship of the subject to the object in will and in love as the fulfilment of the will. Thus, identity in difference is constitutive of the spirit as such, independent of its finite modes of existence.

Delving deeper into the self, the experiencer further sees in his own and in that of the other's contingency and finitude which is an opening into, and a transition to the permanent, the absolute, the eternal and the Infinite One, something identical yet different. That is the Supreme Principle.

German idealists, using the transcendental method of Kant, sought to solve the problem of the finite and Infinite, the many and the one, in the sense of a monistic unity. In Schelling, the Absolute is regarded as the identity of subject-object, spirit and nature as the elements of the universe, as identity which is simply non-difference. For Hegel, of course, the true identity was essentially 'identity of identity and non-identity' opposition and unity at once. But again as Feuerbach objected, the difference of the individual movements is ultimately swallowed up by the identity of the whole.

To the Indians, however, the question of identity is not only a philosophical one but is also a religious one. The infinitely great chasm which exists between the finite and the Infinite can never be overlooked. It is to preserve this differentiation that some of the philosophers brought in the word *maya* (illusion). Whatever it may mean, it conveys the unfathomable differentiation of the finite from the Infinite.

Therefore, the identity of the Indian theologians is an 'identity in difference'. The body-soul relationship in man presented itself as a natural comparison for this identity in separateness, and they called God, 'the soul of the soul'.

Uddalaka Aruni imparted this truth to his son Svetaketu in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* when he said:

Tat tvam asi CU. I.8.6
Thou art That.

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Once the disciple has realized the import of this 'identity in difference' in the light of the Infinite Principle of his being, he repeats the same truth to himself by saying:

Aham Brahmasmi BU. I.4.10
I am the Infinite-Reality

Interpreted according to our exegesis, this means:

I have realized my principal unity and identity with the Infinite by His divine grace, and consequently my principal unity and identity with each and every entity, actual and possible, sustained by the Infinite. My corresponding responsibility is that I must cherish and love all beings even as the Infinite does, since I know that I am one with the Infinite. Cf., John. 13.34

The instruction of Yajnavalkya to his wife Maitreyi, preserved in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (II.4.1-5), shows that some ancient seers understood their relation to God and all creatures in terms of the Infinite and in the Infinite alone.

The formulae are mystical—not to be understood or spoken of lightly. They presuppose proper reverence for God and His universe inculcated by a strict course of Vedic discipline and training. They embody the essence of Vedic tradition and are imparted to chosen disciples alone, at the conclusion of their training as *Vedanta* (*veda* plus *anta*), i.e., the end and purport of 'Divine knowledge'.

A Vedic disciple must prove himself eminently worthy by purity of heart and vigour of mental acumen, so that the likelihood of misunderstanding is minimized. 'He who has not turned away from wicked conduct, whose passions are not tranquil and subdued, or whose mind is not at rest, can never obtain the Supreme-Self even by a surpassing knowledge.'³⁶

navirat dushcharitan nashanto nasamahitah
nashanta-maaso vapi prajnanenainamapnuyat.

Other passages which stress the same point may be consulted in the *Mundaka Upanishad* (III.I.8).³⁷

No higher truth could be imparted to disciples regarding their relation to God. This truth concerns their transcendental and 'principal' identity with the Infinite, considered as the Reality of all realities and the primary and ultimate Principle of being.

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To the Hindu theists, the knowledge of God, as we have said earlier, is a transforming knowledge. The western philosophical dictum, *Cognoscens fit cognitum* (the knower becomes the known) has its parallel in the Hindu philosophical dictum, *Brahma-vid Brahmaiva bhavati*, which means that a person who knows the Infinite becomes like the Infinite. Ramanuja has come closest to a formulation of this doctrine in almost identical words: 'becoming like unto the Infinite' by cognition.³⁸

In the Buddhist tradition, the Bodhisattva obtains full enlightenment or 'awakening' (*samma-sambodhi*) and is cognitively identified with the Eternal law (*dhamma*). The explicit synonyms for this state, which is also accepted in Hindu tradition as *nirvana* (*Bhagavad-Gita*, VI. 15), are *Dhamma-bhuta* and *Brahma-bhuta*, i.e., 'Become-Dhamma' and 'Become-Brahma'.

The intellect is acquisitive of reality. It is not merely an instrument for propounding propositions. Therefore, the knowledge of God created both principally and transcendently, participates in the Infinite Being of God. Life of the Spirit or spiritual life can, therefore, only mean for the Hindu a plenary acquisition by cognition of the Supreme Reality of all realities on a supra-human plane. Only in the presence of Infinite Intelligence, 'which is identically its own act', could man be able to raise himself up by the grace of God to a participation (through a Divine Love-Union) in full measure in His Infinite and Undivided Being-Knowledge-Bliss in absolute transcendence (*akhandasachchidanandamadvayam*).

In terms of mere existence, man enjoys no privilege over other creatures. His distinctiveness arises from participation in a special enlightenment from God. He is enabled to know his relation to the Infinite, not only as a finite creature of the Infinite Creator, but as the noblest reflection of God's power on earth. Elected by God to receive spiritual vision, man can rise by God's grace through all the stages of spiritual life and become heir to all that the Infinite implies, in a final union of love, which implies knowledge.

In the West, we encounter thinkers from time to time who awaken to the real significance of the Infinite, and like their brothers in the East, often seek refuge in the deep silence of genuine mysticism. It is indeed marvellous how, by God's grace, saints have overcome the cramping disadvantages of narrow philosophical heritages to attain the 'Supreme-Identity in difference' (*kaivalyam*), the goal of man's quest for the Infinite.

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The great world evil is selfishness; ignoring man's relation to God is the great original sin. Ignorant selfishness makes man act and desire an existence purely as a self-centred creature. This involves the violation of God's fundamental Order and produces in man himself an eccentricity of psychological perspective which vitiates all his acts and disturbs the entire economy of his social relationships. Man in his deepest constitution is not an independent individual (as he ignorantly fancies himself) but is metaphysically and principally dependent on God (the Infinite). Metaphysically, if man were absolutely independent of God, he would have no existence. If, by God's enlightening grace, man realizes his true theonomic and theocentric relation to God, he begins to see things with God's eyes and is freed from all his troubles and is no longer a source of trouble for others. He begins to participate on earth in the divine point of view, identifying himself responsibly with the welfare of all. The soul, wholly God's, finds that God is wholly hers.

In the Christian tradition, the parting prayer of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, to his Eternal Father articulates this Hindu understanding of the identity of the Soul and God.

Eternal life is knowing Thee, Who art the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

I have made Thy name known to the men whom Thou hast entrusted to me, chosen out of the world. They belonged to Thee, and have become Mine through Thy gift, and they have kept true to Thy work. Now they have learned to recognize all the gifts Thou gavest Me as coming from Thee: I have given them the message which Thou gavest to me, and they, receiving it, recognized it for truth that I came from Thee, and found faith to believe that it was Thou who didst send me.

Father, Thou art just; the world has never acknowledged thee, but I have acknowledged Thee, and these men have acknowledged that Thou didst send me.

I have revealed and will reveal Thy name to them; so that the love Thou hast bestowed on Me may dwell in them; and I, too, may dwell in them.

Christ's universal prayer before he crossed the Valley of the Cedron to be betrayed by Judas moves the Hindu more profoundly than words can express:

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It is not only for them (the immediate disciples) that I pray; I pray for those who are to find faith in Me through their word; that they may all be one; that they too may be one in us, as Thou, Father art in me and I in Thee; so that the world may come to believe that it is Thou who sent Me. And I have given them the privilege which Thou gavest Me; that they should all be one, as we are one; that while Thou art in Me, I may be in them, and so they may be perfectly made one.³⁹

It is precisely with respect to this important question of Identity that some philosophers have completely misunderstood the eastern mind. Students have been persuaded uncritically to take over from some writers the religious term 'pantheism' to describe or explain the reverence the Asiatic exhibits for all creatures.

But 'pantheism' can hardly admit that the Supreme Reality is the absolute Infinite Principle to which all finite beings owe their entity. 'Pantheism' conceives the Godhead as the mere aggregate sum of finite beings. It knows nothing of the principial immanence of the Infinite in finite beings (wherein the transcendence of the Infinite is fully safeguarded); nor of the principial identity of finite beings with the Infinite (wherein the limitations of the finite and the boundless absoluteness of the Infinite are both unaffected).

Another popular term used to describe Hindu philosophy is 'monism'. It is being increasingly used in philosophical textbooks to expound the metaphysical doctrine familiarly known in India as *advaita*. Such uncritical equations are dangerous in the extreme. They detach the eastern student from his traditional moorings and set him adrift on the high seas of modern sceptical modes of thought with promises of great adventure but ending only in complete frustration. 'Monism' has to do with what is 'absolutely one'; *advaita*, on the other hand, has to do with what is 'absolutely not-two'. This is not a mere play on words. The metaphysical implications are far-reaching. They set the monist and *advaitist* points of view poles apart, though at first sight they may seem to be the same. In monism, the finite has reality *on a par* with the Infinite, and is distinguished from the Infinite only as a *measurable* part of the physical universe quantitatively smaller than the whole. Moreover, the finite merely appears to be distinct from the Infinite in monism; the finite is absolutely identical with the Infinite. How the finite can be measured is left unexplained. The finite is regarded rigorously as a measurable part of the Infinite whole, and in fact is proposed as commensurate with the Infinite, which is *not*,

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by this very fact, strictly measurable, and is therefore is not limited as is the finite.

In *advaita*, the finite has its real entity, wholly and absolutely dependent on the Supreme Reality of the Infinite. Its reality is not *on a par* with the Reality of the Infinite. The dependence is so complete in principle (*tattvatah*), that the lesser reality of the finite would lose its very reality (*sat*) if the finite were cut off absolutely from the Infinite which constitutes the very Reality of all realities (*satyasya satyam*). Moreover, the finite is related to the Infinite *not* as a measurable part of anything, but as a non-measurable metaphysical, or particular, logical concept is related to the immeasurable metaphysical 'Absolute Universal' Truth. This is the meaning of *amsha* in the *atmikartha*, i.e., metaphysical sense, the *atma* being necessarily *not* physical. *Advita*, in the Saiva and Vaisnava schools, compromises neither the lesser reality and limitations of the finite nor the Supreme Reality and Absolute transcendence of the Infinite.

To arrive at a clear concept of true metaphysical Infinity in terms of absolute Infinity; to be able to declare unequivocally that man can know the living omniscient presence of the transcendent Infinite to be immanent in the profound subsistence of one's existence—must be the high watermark of philosophy. In the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the depths of philosophical speculation are plumbed when it is declared that in man we have the living, intelligent temple of the Infinite Godhead (*satyam, jnanam, anantam*, etc., *TU*, II. 1).

The idea that every creature is a temple of God and that in man especially—due to his intellectual endowments which enable him to know his relation to his Creator—we can have the most important sanctuary of God's living presence on earth is expressed in the salutation in common use among Indians. With the palms of the hands joined devoutly and raised reverently to the head bowed in worship (*namaskara*) there is a sign of the truth of God's indwelling in man.

If Indian monotheism is understood in the manner presented here, one can regard oneself as the living temple of God (St. Paul: I Cor, 3.16) and is required to look upon his neighbour with the same mystical regard. The great phrase of the Upanishads, *aham brahmasmi* (I am the Infinite) has to be completed by that other great expression *tat tvam asi* (that thou art). The first phrase sums up our duty to our Self; the complementary expression clarifies our duty to our neighbour. The tragedy of religious and philosophical culture in India can be traced unerringly to those of us who find great satisfaction in

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saying *aham brahmasmi* to ourselves but are not prepared to accept the whole doctrine by living up to the meaning of *tat tvam asi*, which has to be attributed unreservedly to the neighbour. It would mean that we have not referred ourselves truly and principally to the Supreme Self.

We have reached the end of our quest. We are now in a position to sum up the salient features of the philosophy of Indian monotheism.

The usual Hindu definition of God, for instance, as *sachchidananda* is considered even by western philosophers and theologians as one of the best possible definitions of God. God as the absolute Being is the absolute Subject and as Absolute knowledge is the absolute Predicate. The union of the Absolute Subject with the Absolute Predicate in the copula of identity is the absolute self-sufficiency or bliss (*ananda*).

To the Indian theists, as with other theists, the souls and the world are real. The laws of intelligibility, however, make them reduce the world to God till it disappears in Him, who is the foundation of all possibles. The same laws make them deduce the world from God, who contains it eminently. The world, therefore, is real by God in God and for God. From being present to God in His own way as Principle, it has come to be present to itself in its own way as finite. In other words, the world is outside God because it is inside itself. Perhaps the Theory of Creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) would have made it easier to grasp this concept as is the case with other monotheistic religions. Its absence may be a handicap but it is not absolutely necessary for the philosophy of monotheism.

Further, the philosophy of Indian monotheism states that the highest knowledge consists in attaining the knowledge which God has of Himself. Coming from nothing and being only able to realize God in and through the world and in and through our own soul, we cannot see God as He sees Himself if grace does not transform our nature and illumine it. God, by His grace, must create a new eye within our soul by which we are able to see Him in the light of His auto-gnosis. This true knowledge of God, gained by His grace, will of course, induce us to dis-identify ourselves from the world and our worldly self in order to identify ourselves with God, and in God with our ideal world and ideal self. But only love can achieve this whole identification with God. Although Sankara thinks that mystical absorption in God constitutes our identification with God, the more numerous *bhaktas* however, proclaim that surrender to God inspired by love makes us one with Him. Such a surrender does not at all blot out our separate existence

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from God. The *bhaktas* maintained that the more we are for God the more God will be for us.

Finally, an objection could be raised on the basis that the *karma-samsara* theory which is one of the constituent elements of Hinduism has been altogether ignored in this book. The reason for this is that, although the Indian theologians had accepted the *karma-samsara* theory as a necessary postulate on which they tried to build their theologies, yet in reality, being an ethical theory, *karma-samsara* is not at all relevant to monotheism. The Judaic, Christian and Islamic monotheisms have no *karma* theory. The philosophy of monotheism requires neither the creation theory of the West nor the *karma-samsara* theory of the East for its understanding and practice. If one were to insist further on the question by saying, 'could Indian Theism leave out the *karma-samsara* theory and still call itself Indian?' We answer it by requesting the questioner to study the monotheism of the *Rig-Veda*, wherein one can find hardly any trace of the *karma-samsara* theory. And the *Rig-Veda* is the foundation stone on which Indian religions are built and without which there is no such thing as the Hindu tradition.

CONCLUSION

The chequered history of Indian monotheism through the centuries of its struggle for existence in the hearts of the people against the forces of monism and pantheism on the one side and of polytheism on the other, could not be obliterated by a stroke of intellectual acrobatics over the interpretation of the sacred scriptures of the Hindus.

The religious milieu in which the philosophies in India grew and from which they took their direction and shape should, I think, be taken into consideration if one wants to do justice both to the authors and to their philosophies. Most, if not all, of the authors being religious men, the interpretation of their writings should not go against their own or their followers' own religious conviction and practice. The concrete outburst of theistic Bhakti cults all over India in the form of Saivaite or Vaishnavaite or other sects, or later in the Brahmo Samaj or Arya Samaj movements, culminating in the monotheistic religion of the Sikhs, is a solid witness to the monotheistic religious experience of the people.

Therefore, when we see the *Rig-Vedic* monotheism so clearly spelled out in the Varuna hymns, when we see the subsequent dismal

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failures of monistic and pantheistic tendencies during the Upanishadic period to subdue and overcome it and finally when we see its resurgence from the theism of their ancestors by way of *avatara* explanations, we begin to doubt the validity of the arguments which present monism and pantheism as the religious philosophy of the Hindus.

Our interpretation seems to preserve without contradiction both the religious experiences of the people and the religious philosophy of the philosophers. Thus, the philosophy of Indian monotheism stands vindicated by the religious experience of the people without at the same time sacrificing the spirit of the *advaitic* experience of the philosophers.

NOTES

1. Zimmer, Heinrich, *Philosophies of India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1971, p. 28.
2. Ibid., p. 30.
3. Hume, R.E., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., New York, 1975, p. 30.
4. Swami Nikhilananda, *The Upanishads*, Harper Torchbooks, 1963, p. 33.
5. Ibid., p. 245; *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 7.24.1.
6. *Tarkasangraha*, III. 7.
7. Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy*, George Allen & Unwin, London, Vol. II, 1930, p. 174.
8. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, q. vii, art. 1 and 2.
9. The greatest influence of Hindu culture has been exerted by its contemplative and mystical forms. What is *Dhyana* in India has become *Ch'an* in China and *Zen* in Japan. See the various studies by T. Suzuki.
10. *Atmabodha*, 64.
11. cf., *Tejobinay Upanishad*, III; *Manduka Upanishad*, I.
12. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II. 1.
13. Ibid., II. 1.
14. *Katha Upanishad*, II. 20.
15. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, III. 11.
16. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. 4. 22.
17. *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, X. 38.1; *Katha Upanishad*, IV. 12.13, VI. 17; *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, III. 13; V. 8; VI. 5; *Maitri Upanishad*, VI. 38; *Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad*, XVI. 3, etc. In the *Mahabharata* period *angustha-matra-purusa* already meant the human soul, as is seen in the case of Yama extracting the *angustha-matra-purusam* from the body of Prince Satyawana (Vana Parva, 16763-5). But in Upanishadic times it is well differentiated from the individual soul; *angustha matra purusha madhye atmani*, 'the person of the measure of a thumb in the middle of the soul' (*Katha Upanishad*, IV. 12).

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18. Arunandi, *Siva-Jnana-Siddhiyar*, V, p. 244.
19. Manika Vasagar, *Tiruvasagam*, XXII, v. 40 (Pope, p. 224).
20. Sastri, Ramaswami, *The Evolution of Indian Mysticism*, I.B.H., Bombay, n.d., p. 83.
21. Srinivasachari, *Ramanuja's Idea of the Infinite Self*, Theosophical Society, Madras, n.d., p. 64.
22. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. 4.16.
23. *Epistola Barnabae*, XVI. 8; Jurgens, William A., *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1970, p. 15.
24. Upadhyaya, 'The Infinite and the Finite', *Sophia*, Calcutta, 1897.
25. St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Interior Castle*, Baker, London, 1912, pp. 4-5.
26. Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 2, Migne, P.G., XX, Col. 525.
27. *Katha Upanishad*, IV. 13.
28. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, V. 8.
29. Manika Vasagar, *Tiruvasagam*, XXXVII, v. 17 (Pope, p. 294).
30. Granada, *Guia de pecadores*, 1, 1, c. 14.
31. Monier-Williams, Sir M., *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1960 (New ed.), p. 432.
32. Ibid.
33. *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, I. 12.
34. *Katha Upanishad*, II. 23; *Mundaka Upanishad*, III. 2-3.
35. Hegel, *Phenomenon of the Mind*, Oxford University Press, London, p. 9.
36. *Katha Upanishad*, I. 2.24.
37. Also in *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, IV. 4.23 and IV. 2.1.
38. Bharatan Kumarappa, *The Hindu Concept of the Deity as Culminating in Ramanuja*, Luzac & Co., London, 1934, pp. 317-27.
39. John, 17. Read the entire chapter.

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